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penguin eggs

Issue No 10

Summer 2001



**Premiere
Print
Edition**

Michael Brook

Eliza Carthy
Shemekia Copeland
Olu Dara
La Volée d'Castors
Buddy MacMaster
Virginia Rodrigues
Mike Stevens
Stony Plain Records
Eric Westbury

Win
Jez Lowe CDs

SQUEEZE TWANG BLOW & BANG

Beyond the Pale Michael Jerome Browne Rick Fielding Bill Garrett & Sue Lothrop
James Gordon Mark Haines and Tom Leighton Penny Lang Grit Laskin Tom
Lewis Matapat Eileen McGann Night Sun David Parry Rukanas Scarlett,
Washington, and Whiteley Mose Scarlett Sirens Christina Smith and Jean Hewson
Mike Stevens Tanglefoot Terry Tufts Clay Tyson Jackie Washington Sneezy
Waters Nancy White Chris Whiteley Ken Whiteley The Whiteley Brothers

5 FOLKIN' YEARS OF GREAT CANADIAN MUSIC

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penguin eggs

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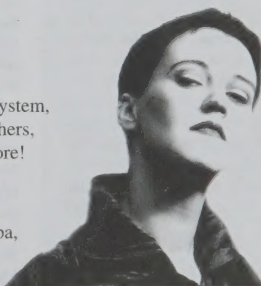
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Eliza Carthy



Mary Jane Lamond

NIC JONES

PENGUIN EGGS

This magazine takes its name from Nic Jones' impossibly wonderful *Penguin Eggs* – a collection of mainly traditional British folk songs revitalized with extraordinary flair and ingenuity. Released in Britain in 1980, it has grown into a source of inspiration for such young, gifted performers as Kate Rusby and Eliza Carthy. Bob Dylan was so taken with Nick's powerful arrangements that he covered *Canadee-i-o* virtually note for note on *Good As I Been To You*. Sadly though, Nic suffered horrific injuries in a car crash on his way home from a gig in the early hours of February, 26, 1982. He has never fully recovered nor performed since. His care and respect shown for the tradition and prudence to recognize the merits of innovation makes *Penguin Eggs* such an outrageously fine recording. This is the spirit this magazine will strive to reiterate. Count on it.

– Roddy Campbell

Nic Jones' *Penguin Eggs* is available on Topic Records (TSCD-411) in Europe and on Shanachie Records (79090) throughout North America.



News

Stringband broke up in 1986 after 15 years of playing together. To mark the 30th anniversary of their very first gig, former members are compiling **The Indispensable Stringband** – a double CD slated for release this fall. But they need help. Original founder **Bob Bossin** wants old fans and friends to select their favourite tracks from the band's six LPs as well as loan live tapes, photos and memorabilia for consideration for the project. He can be reached at www.stringband.net or bob@stringband.net.

Formed in 1971, "Stringband," in the words of **Gary Cristall**, co-founder of the **Vancouver Folk Music Festival**, "proved there was an enormous amount of music worth playing in Canada. They proved musicians could actually make a living without leaving the country. They paved the way for artists like **Stan Rogers**, **Connie Kaldor** and dozens of others."

Former members and collaborators of Stringband included **Marie-Lynn Hammond**, **Calvin Cairns**, **Ben Mink**, **Daniel Lanois** and **Stan Rogers**.

★ ★ ★

The Jasper Heritage Folk Festival returns August 3-4 after an absence of three years. Founded and guided by **Sherrill Meropoulos** from 1985 to 1998 until fatigue forced her into an extended sabbatical, Jasper ran every second year. **Tim Pare** has taken over as artistic director and has booked the likes of **Oysterband**, **Ashley MacIsaac** and **Garnet Rogers**. For further information call (780) 852-3629.

★ ★ ★

Vancouver's **Rogue Folk Club** appears on the rebound after facing near financial ruin last year. Poor attendance – down 20 percent



Garnet Rogers: Jasper folk festival date

from 1999 – and lack of a decent-sized resident venue helped create the crisis, said club founder **Steve Edge**. A benefit concert that flopped, didn't help matters. However, a move to a spacious soft-seat theater in North Vancouver's Capilano College and subsequent successful gigs with the likes of **Stephen Fearing**, **Solas**, **Dervish** and **Fred Eaglesmith** have helped stabilize the club's finances. "I'm relatively optimistic for the future," said Edge, who founded the **Rogue** in 1987 and has since averaged 50 to 60 concerts a year. Volunteers interested in working for the club can call (604) 736-3022. Upcoming concerts include **Matapat** and **Willie & Lobo** (July 26-27), **Oysterband** (August 1), **Dougie MacLean** (August 8) and **Shooglenifty** (August 17). **Steve Edge** also hosts **The Edge On Folk**, Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. on **CITR FM 101.9** in Vancouver.

★ ★ ★

The Winnipeg Folk Festival has changed its artistic director. **Pierre Guerin** left to manage **The Wyrd Sisters** and **Rick Fenton** has taken over. Edmonton-based, Fenton formerly worked for **CBC Radio**, where he produced **Saturday Night Blues** and recorded various jazz, folk and blues festivals for such shows as **The Entertainers** and **Definitely Not The Opera**. During the past few years, he has produced albums for **Amos Garrett** and **Bill Bourne** and is slated to work on a live **Ian Tyson** album. Performers confirmed for this year's event, July 5-8, include **Crash Test Dummies**, **Kate Rusby**, **Danú** and **Maria Dunn**. (See advertisement on page 10 for complete lineup.)

★ ★ ★

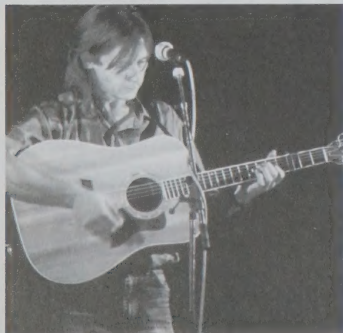
Victoria's Roots Festival offers an attractive lineup for its second year. **WOMAD** runs in Seattle on the same weekend and artistic director **Jamie Kelly** has managed to share several of its acts, including the **Blind Boys of Alabama** and **David Lindley**. Other performers confirmed for the weekend of July 27-29 include **Billy Bragg**, **Eliza Carthy Band** and **Laura Love**. For further information call (250) 386-3655.

★ ★ ★

WOMAD USA takes place at King County's Marymoor Park, located 15 miles east of Seattle, Washington. Artists appearing there include **Peter Gabriel** as a special guest vocalist with the **Afro Celt Sound System**, **Robert Plant** and **The Strange Sensation**, **Asian Dub Foundation**, **Neville Brothers**, **Yousou N'Dour & Super Etoile de Dakar**, **Transglobal Underground** and **Matapat**. There's a \$10 discount on tickets until July 26th. Discounted tickets are \$65 U.S. for a three-day pass or \$25 a day and are available at all Ticketmaster outlets, or charge by phone at 1-206-628-0888.

★ ★ ★

Fiddler and traditional singer **Gillian Frame** won the **Young Scottish Traditional Musician, 2001** at the **Celtic Connections** festival in Glasgow in January. Part of her prize includes a booking at **The Vancouver Folk Music Festival**, July 13-15. Frame will be joined by **Hamish Napier** (accordion, keyboards) and **Simon McKerrroll** (pipes, whistles). This trio came second in the **BBC Radio 2, Young Folk Award** – a competition for traditional musicians throughout Britain. Anyone with an interest in setting up a similar competition in Canada, please contact the Editor.



Dougie MacLean plays the Rogue



Eileen McGann performs at Harbourfront



Martin Carthy turns 60

★ ★ ★

Several milestones are fast approaching for various institutions on the good planet folk roots. **Bob Dylan** turns 60. So too does **Martin Carthy**. While **Red House Records** has released *A Nod To Bob* – tribute covers from the likes of **Tom Landa & The Paperboys** and **Martin Simpson** – **Free Reed Records** offer *The Carthy Chronicles* – a comprehensive four CD retrospective covering all aspects of his varied and influential career.

The venerable U.S. folk magazine, **Sing Out**, reaches its half century. **The School of Scottish Studies**, based in Edinburgh University, also enters its 50th year. The School, and in particular its principal archivist, **Hamish Henderson**, is responsible for many irreplaceable field recordings released as the **Scottish Tradition** series. **Greentrax Records** will release a compilation from this series later in the year. **Greentrax** too has an anniversary to celebrate, its 15th. And both **Green Linnet Records** and **Stony Plain Records** and have reached their 25th. **Stony Plain** founder **Holger Petersen** has just received an honoree doctorate from Athabasca University. Petersen will become a Doctor of Letters in recognition for his many contributions to Canadian music, broadcasting and the arts.

Borealis Records turns five this summer. Since starting the label in 1996 with **Grit Laskin's** *A Few Simple Words* and **The Whiteley Brothers' Sixteen Shades Of Blue**, its catalogue has grown to 42 releases. On June 29th and 30th, in cooperation with Toronto's Harbourfront Centre, **Borealis** will stage a free folk festival showcasing almost its entire roster. Concerts and workshops will take place on four stages at the Harbourfront site starting Friday evening and ending late Saturday on the Canada Day weekend. Performers participating include **Night Sun, Matapat, Eileen McGann** and **Nancy White**. For more information contact **Borealis** at (416) 530-4288.

★ ★ ★

Murray McLauchlan returned to the concert stage in May after an absence of five years. He opened for the **Everly Brothers** on four of their Ontario dates. **McLauchlan** has spent the past half decade working in radio, television and writing his autobiography.

Deaths

Zydeco pioneer **Boozoo Chavis** died on

May 4 in Austin, Texas, after suffering a heart attack and stroke. He was 70. His 1954 regional hit, *Paper In My Shoe*, is widely considered Zydeco's first popular record. Unlike his contemporary **Clifton Chenier** who played an accordion with piano-like keys, **Chavis** played a diatonic button accordion with the tips of two fingers missing from his left hand – the result of an accident hooking a barbecue pit to a trailer hitch. While frequently difficult to interview – much of his early royalties disappeared without trace, leaving him bitter about his past – he was a warm, engaging and often raw performer on stage. Indeed, his 1999 Rounder release, *Who Stole My Monkey*, came with a parental advisory sticker – another zydeco first – due to its saucy matraiel. On his trademark white Stetson, he had 'Boozoo Chavis King of Zydeco' embossed in brass letters, a title he inherited from the **Rockin' Dopsie**. **Chavis** had just completed recording an album, tentatively titled, *I'm Still Blinkin'*.

★ ★ ★

Scotland's **Davy Steele** passed away in April after a year-long battle with cancer. He was 52. Born in the small East Lothian village of Prestonpans, **Steele** evolved into a gifted singer and songwriter. His writing, frequently laced with a biting social commentary, and his warm, tender singing were both firmly rooted in the Scottish tradition. **Steele** made three solo albums as well as recording and performing with various bands such as **Drinkers Drouth**, **Ceolbeag**, **Gael Force**, **Clan Alba** and latterly **The Battelfield Band**. **Jim Gilchrist** wrote in *The Scotsman* newspaper: 'An ebullient stage presence, **Steele** had a powerful and instantly recognisable voice that was also capable of great sensitivity. A natural Scots tongue enhanced his delivery of traditional material and, of course, Burns' songs. It also richly permeated the products of his own songwriting, many of which deal with the history and changing lot of the people who had toiled to shape his own East Lothian community – miners, fishermen, salt-pan workers and farm labourers. Among these, songs such as *Farewell Tae The Haven* are now sung by other artists with all the ring of "authentic" traditional material.'

Quotes

"What is the most natural, rootsy, thrilling musical form of the last 30 years? Rap. Obviously. Conceived and performed on the streets with its own language, its own culture, its own rules, its own references, its own sense of tradition, its own working class expression, rap is the one true modern folk music form."

— **Colin Irwin**, *fRoots*, March, 2001.

[A free copy of *Penguin Eggs* to anyone who sends in a colourful quote that makes it onto this page. Please include source, author and date. We also welcome news from all areas of the folk, roots community. . . *The Ed*]

Editorial

You hold in your hands the first magazine in Canada to focus exclusively on folk, roots and world music. Possibly, it is also the only national periodical to start on the Internet and revert to a conventional format. Folk music, after all, has traditions to uphold.

No Luddites here, however. Worldwide Web sites are wonderful, inexpensive tools for entertaining, enlightening, promoting and marketing. Truly, the Internet is the greatest resource center ever created. And yet, for the most part, its assets are fleeting. Content changes rapidly and permanent records are rare and scattered. For example, nothing remains of the first two issues of *Penguin Eggs*. Ugly and unmanageable printed copies made their way to the garbage bin almost immediately. And sadly, items saved electronically vanished from a faulty storage disc.

Just as vulnerable, though, is the folk tradition and its numerous offshoots. In this issue, **Eliza Carthy** makes incredibly passionate comments about her views and fears for England's traditional folk music. And Quebec's *La Volée d'Castors* have equally fervent things to say about their musical heritage.

Of course 76-year-old **Buddy MacMaster** is the living tradition – as important to Cape Breton fiddle music as **Robert Johnson** was to the blues. **MacMaster's** an irreplaceable link to a culture once thought extinct at its Scottish source. His colorful comments offer an insight to the past and, hopefully, provide encouragement and motivation for the future. And all of their observations are saved for posterity here in *Penguin Eggs*. And that truly is the crux – the ability to document and preserve – of moving to print.

Future content in this magazine will, as always, focus largely on emerging and established Canadian talent, but not exclusively. **Myopia** does not belong in the *Penguin Eggs* lexicon. Besides, how could we possibly ignore the incredible music made by the likes of **Virginia Rodrigues**, **Baaba Maal**, **Afro Celt Sound System** or **Groupa** and remain credible?

"A good newspaper," **Arthur Miller** once remarked, "is a nation talking to itself." The same, I suppose, can be said of a magazine. The question is though, is anybody listening? I can stand on my soap-box and scream blue bloody murder for an eternity about the importance of traditional music. But if nobody gives a fig, what then? Actions, of course, speak louder than words. And in its own humble way, *Penguin Eggs*, for me at least, is a modest start to correcting years of erosion and neglect. Now is the time to roll up our collective sleeves.

— **Roddy Campbell**

Tubthumping

Back Tracking

Eric Westbury plays a guitar with five strings and sings with a partially paralyzed vocal cord.

Roddy Campbell is suitably impressed.

"Even if you don't have much time for singer-songwriters, I'm hoping you won't find it 'pitiful' and 'sniveling,'" wrote Eric Westbury, referring to certain snarky remarks made by some *Penguin Eggs* reviewer or other. Me.

"It" refers to his disc, *Walking Tracks*. And no, it is neither pitiful nor snivelling. On the contrary, yer honor, it's a hugely irresistible recording clearly rooted in the spartan, Alt.country, *No Depression* camp.

With its fresh and resourceful lyrics frequently doused with a compelling philosophical bent, *Walking Tracks*' emotional spectrum ranges from depression – *Churchill's Black Dog* – to life's simple pleasures – [*A Bottle of Bourbon and*] *Five Strings*. Cursory comparisons to Guy Clark spring to mind. Likewise, notions of Steve Earle, Son Volt and, of course, Wilko.

The latter two deserve special mention because Westbury's voice appears tempered in a manner similar to Jay Farrar and Jeff Tweedy's. Such a comparison, however, is purely coincidental. Westbury owns neither of their discs and professes more of an interest in earlier Americana such as The Long Riders and Rank 'n' File. Besides, he was born with partially paralyzed vocal chords.

"That's a funny story," he says. "I always had a really rough voice, especially for a kid. It never really changed. When I started talking in front of adults, I just got used to their eyes opening wide. They couldn't believe what was coming out of this little kid."

"When I was in elementary school, the staff basically made my parents take me to the doctor. Apparently one of the vocal cords is partially paralyzed, so it works sometimes and not others. Nothing caused it, it was just there from birth."

Walking Tracks, to paraphrase Joni Mitchell, looks at life from both sides now. For Westbury, a founding member of Calgary's brash rockabilly-punk unit, The Hooligan Preachers, life's big issues, once seen vehemently in terms of black or white, no longer appear so explicit. A bout of melanoma can



Apparently, Eric Westbury's not comfortable promoting himself.

have that effect on a body.

"I had skin cancer. Luckily, they caught it very early. That was about 1993 or '94. I wrote *Next Showing Of The Big Picture* following that. No one was telling me I was going to die, luckily, but it still makes you think about it and that was probably a factor in some of the tunes."

Certainly, the clever word play of *Tightly Wound* springs to mind. Likewise, the buoyant, bluegrass banjo-fueled *Five Strings*. More general stand-out tracks include the ballad *Too Many, Too Few*.

"It never hurts to have a guy in jail song on any album in my opinion And so that was mine right there."

There's also the novel, dark heart of *Hooves & Horns* and the compelling aforementioned *Churchill's Black Dog*.

"Winston Churchill, when he was blue, he called it his dog – these periods of his life when things weren't going great. And I thought that was a great analogy for the blues. I liked the idea of an animal poking his head into a room. I thought it would make an interesting blues song."

Eric Westbury was born in Calgary, the son of a doctor and the youngest of four brothers. At 13, he was sent to boarding school for five years to Winnipeg, where his interest in music started with an early Joe Jackson LP of his brother's.

"That was the first time I really remember that I liked music. Which is kind of weird, because I'm a long way from Joe Jackson. I just listened to what my brothers listened to

until a friend of mine from Winnipeg sent me a cassette with The Clash on one side and Stiff Little Fingers on the other. That blew me away. I just couldn't believe that. That was the first time I thought this would be something that would be fun to do."

While interest in The Clash led to an infatuation with rockabilly, the do-it-yourself ethos of punk had left-handed Westbury play guitar up-side-down and with only five strings.

"I don't bother putting the E-string on. The real experts look down on it. But to me it's about writing a song. If I can write a song and people understand what the song is about, and it has some effect on them, does it really matter if there's five strings and up-side-down or six and right? I don't care about that stuff."

Returning from Winnipeg in 1986, Westbury wrote and recorded *Between The Cradle And The Grave* – basically two-step country ground out with an electric guitar. His idiosyncratic vocals, however, gave it an edge similar to that of The Long Riders. And it charted at CJSW, the local campus radio.

"It was up there on the charts, and I said, 'What are we going to do about it?' And my oldest brother played drums, he said, 'Let's get some guys together.' And that's basically how it started."

With The Hooligan Preachers, Westbury made a second single, *Wives Of Washington*, and a cassette, *One Dead, One On The Run*. But by the late eighties, they were a spent force. He flitted in and out of various partnerships before releasing the six-track disc, *Last Stop In Claxton*, in 1994. A year later, after completing a degree in philosophy at the University of Calgary, he left for B.C.'s Okanagan Valley and a solo career.

"When I moved out here, I didn't know any other musicians. I continued to write songs. When the Hooligan Preachers broke up, I tried to stop. It was like, 'If I'm not in a band, what's the point?' It's difficult to establish a band when somebody is the primary songwriter. If I want a certain amount of control over how the songs are recorded and so on I have to do it by myself."

"To release your own music, you've really got to promote yourself. I find a lot of that is too egocentric. It sort of takes the focus off the music. I'm not comfortable with that. I'd rather people just listen to the album."

[*Walking Tracks* is released through Cow Meets Steak Productions, 10987 Hare Rd, Lake Country BC, V4H 2H6. email: cowmeetssteak@yahoo.ca]

Tubthumping



Silva Lining

Virginia Rodrigues's family were so poor they couldn't afford a radio. But she has risen from the slums of Brazil to become one of world music's most revered singers. Helen Metella documents her tale.

The music industry loves rags-to-riches tales. Loretta Lynn, Tina Turner and even Shania Twain all reaped acres of press by pulling themselves up by their bootstraps to become singing Cinderellas.

Now it's the turn of Brazil's Virginia Rodrigues. She too beat long odds, in a journey from a Brazilian slum to the celebrated concert stages of Europe and North America. But her story requires translation from Portuguese to English, her music is unusual and devotional, and she doesn't wear spandex, so her tale has been less widely reported.

Virginia Rodrigues da Silva grew up dirt-poor in Salvador da Bahia on the Atlantic coast of Northern Brazil. She was in her early 30s, cleaning houses and manicuring nails when she made her public singing debut, performing one traditional song in the street-theatre group Bando de Teatro Olodum, in 1997. The theatre organization is connected to the renowned Olodum drum group, black cultural activists who played on Paul Simon's *Rhythm of the Saints*. The group's musical director Marcio Meireles invited legendary Brazilian singer-songwriter Caetano Veloso to the performance and Veloso was bowled over by Rodrigues's rich contralto.

He wasted no time in recording her, signing her to a tiny label co-owned by his wife. Rodrigues's first album, *Sol Negro*, was

recorded without sophisticated techniques in an improvised studio on the second floor of a house, in order to preserve the raw beauty of her timbre and timing. On hand were several of Veloso's long-time associates in the famed Tropicalismo political-song movement, including Milton Nascimento and Gilberto Gil. Four years and another album later, Rodrigues has been transformed into the pre-eminent world music sensation of the moment, with publications as diverse as *Rolling Stone*, *The New York Times* and *Le Monde* heralding her.

Every performer lives for a lucky break. What makes Rodrigues's story so poignant is that it's unlikely she would have pursued her destiny as single-mindedly as other aspiring recording artists do. For she knew it to be an incredible long-shot and had been resigned to that since she was a child when she "played on the streets, with cloth dolls."

As a pre-teen, Rodrigues picked up songs of both samba and spirituality from the *blocos*, black performers who paraded during Carnival in the streets of Salvador. The city of three million is often called the most African city in all of the Americas and it's the soul of black Brazilian culture. Like untold teenagers around the world, Rodrigues graduated to singing these songs into a hairbrush, pretending to be on stage. But her family, which included three brothers, three nephews and grandparents, lived in circumstances so humble they couldn't afford a radio, let alone music lessons.

"Without the support and the background, it was quite difficult to have a career in music," says Rodrigues through an interpreter, during a concert stop in San Francisco. "It's a very expensive career and I realized that very early in my life."

Her sole musical training came from singing in choirs — both Catholic and Protestant — that abound in Salvador's hundreds of churches. There she learned that her dramatic and authoritative voice was born to project the timeless grace of sacred music, sung a cappella. But hers is sacred music unlike that which most of the Western world would understand.

"I'm not a member of any kind of religion," she states emphatically. "I appreciate it all, but my religion is *candomble*."

Candomble derives from Brazil's unique history. The Portuguese settled Brazil in the late 1400s, soon exterminating the indigenous people living in the tropical forests while deciding the more remotely located natives were too inaccessible to conquer. Instead, they imported several million African slaves. Although African rituals and religion were prohibited, the slaves simply renamed their deities as Roman Catholic saints, and secretly continued their culture. Today, the majority of

Brazil's 150 million people are black or mulatto and many embrace both *candomble* and the Catholic or Protestant faiths.

The material on Rodrigues's second album, *Nos*, is even more focused on *candomble* songs chanted and sung during carnival than *Sol Negro*, which also featured a smattering of samba and a Gilberto Gil composition. Many of songs on *Nos* are dedications to *candomble* gods, known as *orixas*. But instead of the exuberant percussive treatment this material receives in its popular presentation, Rodrigues delivers a more classical and intimate approach. Subtly underscored by stark strings, wind instruments and percussion, the songs are prayerful and powerful.

Yet Rodrigues struggles trying to describe why it is so important to her to showcase this music for the rest of the world, saying simply, "It is impossible to talk about Brazilians and the black Brazilians without it."

In concert, the motive is less mysterious. When she is singing a cappella, Rodrigues sounds like an entire choir filling a cathedral with the many voices of God. Accompanied minimally by a trio of top-rung Brazilian musicians (guitarist Luiz Brazil, sax and flute player Raul Mascarenhas and percussionist Ronaldo Silva) she is an animated lyric opera singer, investing an epic story with personal meaning, despite the language barrier. Clearly, just like the complicated religion of *candomble*, this music is capable of expressing a multitude of deep-seated perspectives.

And although Rodrigues's voice is as majestic as deeply burnished mahogany, in the centre of every song — whether melancholy or sunny — is a lilting serenity. These songs, with lyrics about how Afro-Brazilian culture has sustained despite centuries of racism, remind her that all is right with the world.

Today, in Rodrigues's world, everything is more than all right, she says, because "I am able to make my own living now."

Throughout 2001 she will touch down in Salvador only briefly, "just enough time to change suitcases," as she tours in North America and Europe "over and over." Her next major goal is to record an album of songs with more variety, songs that more closely echo the happiness that comes from being the music world's newest Cinderella.



Jenny Allen
 Billy Boy Arnold
 The Be Good Tanyas
 Black Umfolosi
 Bill Bourne
 Richard Buckner
 Dave Carter & Tracy Grammer
 Eliza Carthy
 Neko Case & Her Boyfriends
 The Chicken Snails Roadshow
 Cindy Church
 J.P. Cormier
 Cowboy Junkies
 Kris Demeanor
 Maria Dunn & Shannon Johnson
 Stacey Earle with Mark Stuart
 Festival House Band
 The Flatlanders (Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Joe Ely, Butch Hancock)
 David Francey
 Rosco Gordon
 Great Big Sea
 Tim Harrison
 Richie Havens
 Jim Henry
 The Holmes Brothers
 Johnnie Johnson
 Carlos del Junco
 Ron Kavana, Mick Coyne and Steve White
 Paddy Keenan
 Joel Kroeker
 Dennis Lakusta
 David Lindley with Wally Ingram
 Baaba Maal feat. Daande Lenol
 Dougie MacLean
 Natalie MacMaster
 Kathy Mattea
 Danny Michel
 Los Morenos
 Mortal Coil
 Maria Muldaur
 Tim O'Brien, Darrell Scott, Dirk Powell
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 The Duke Robillard Band
 Billy Joe Shaver
 Shooglenifty
 Ballaké Sissoko
 Martina Sorbara
 Lyall Steel
 Stoney Park
 Super Rail Band
 Kathryn Tickell
 Toots & the Maytals
 La Volée d'Castors
 Ann Vriend
 The Waifs
 Jennifer Warnes
 Jesse Winchester
 Wyrd Sisters

Edmonton Folk Music Festival

August 9 - 12, 2001

Gallagher Park

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www.edmontonfolkfest.org

Tubthumping

Solid Ground

Stony Plain Records celebrates its 25th anniversary. Roddy Campbell meets the chairman of the board, Holger Petersen.

Signed John Lennon lithographs hang next to colorful prints of Bill Monroe and Hank Williams. Well chosen black and white photos of various blues icons plying their trade dominate another wall. Everywhere else, shelves upon shelves of countless CDs furnish the former living room of a modest Edmonton bungalow that now houses the world headquarters of Stony Plain Records.

Holger Petersen's eclectic taste in art truly reflects his diverse musical appetite. As the creative driving force behind Stony Plain, currently celebrating its 25th anniversary, he has released a roster as diverse as Emmylou Harris, Robert Cray, Fairport Convention and Jesse Winchester that enjoys distribution on every continent of the globe. His impressive catalog has earned nine Juno awards, numerous Canadian Country Music Association awards, and tributes from such musical giants as Jerry Wexler.

Indeed Wexler, who coined the term rhythm and blues, shaped the sixties soul of Aretha Franklin and Wilson Pickett, and produced records for the likes of Bob Dylan and Dire Straits, flatteringly toasts Petersen on the sleeve notes of *25 Years* – the new specially priced double disc celebrating the label's quarter century.

"In the milieu of monolithic mergers he has flourished against damn near insuperable odds, holding on – and holding out – in his Edmonton fortress, a virtual Masada of Canada. He has a wonderful label, he presents wonderful music, and I congratulate him," writes Wexler.

The late, ebullient Texas legend, Doug Sahm, initially introduced Petersen to Wexler.

"Doug had all these amazing connections," says Petersen, "and one day we were talking about Jerry Wexler, somehow. And he said, 'Oh well, let's give Jerry a call.' So he called Jerry. They were really, really close friends and Doug introduced me to Jerry over the phone."

Over a period of time, Petersen and Wexler developed a friendship. Stony Plain recordings duly made their way south, including the latest Maria Muldrar disc, *Richland Woman Blues*.

"He says this record should win a Grammy. When you get somebody like that on your side, it's pretty amazing. It made my year, that's for sure, to get those kinds of com-



Holger Petersen's label has released 275 recordings in 25 years

pliments from one of my heroes. It doesn't get much better than that; it's Jerry Wexler."

Stony Plain has, as Jerry Wexler noted, survived against long odds. It almost folded twice only to receive last-minute reprieves. For its first 15 years, it remained essentially a one-man company. With a chuckle, the amiable Petersen freely concedes his hands-on style of management leads to the odd missed opportunity: passing on The Cowboy Junkies' *Trinity Sessions* and the Barenaked Ladies' initial recording being two of his more controversial decisions.

"The Cowboy Junkies, I just didn't get it. In retrospect, that obviously was a big record and made for a fairly successful career. That bothered me for a long time. But I listened to it again and I still don't get it. More power to the band, you know. But it just didn't touch me and having been a Sandy Denny fan I just thought, nice try but it doesn't quite make it."

"The Barenaked Ladies — that one I really regret, because I think they are a fun band and they don't take the music too seriously."

"But a thing people don't realize is how busy a small record label is and how the taking

of a decision is such a serious matter. It has never been the kind of company where you say, 'Let's release a bunch of records and see what happens.' Everything decision is very serious because it limits your resources and potentially puts you out of business."

Despite such pitfalls, Petersen has released 275 recordings and licensed almost 2,000 imports from the likes of U.S. labels Sugar Hill and Rounder. When judging the potential release of a disc, he looks for basic but unique qualities: talented song writing, a sense of direction – "what will the artist be doing 20 years from now" – and maturity.

"We tend to work with older artists who have honed their craft. I think people get better with age. The oldest artist we work with is Jay McShann. He's 86."

Ian Tyson's Canadian platinum-selling (100,000 copies) *Cowboyography* remains Stony Plain's biggest seller to date.

Released in 1986, at a time of growing interest in cow-

boy culture sparked by the cowboy poetry festival in Elko, Nevada, Tyson unconsciously but superbly tapped into its momentum.

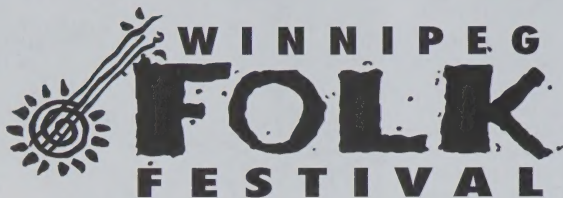
"Ian decided to record the most cowboy kind of record he had ever made with no concessions to anybody. It was made for the few hundred working cowboys that existed at the time. He wrote about cowboy themes and lifestyle using lines like, 'The twisted wrist of the hoolahan throw,' and things like that not a lot of people would understand."

"The timing was right because there was this interest in the cowboy culture and the songs transcended the scope of the market because of the quality. As a result, Ian had a number of singles that did especially well and that year won several CCMA awards and a few Junos. It went on to open a few doors in a big, big way."

Aside from running Stony Plain Records, Petersen enjoys a parallel career in radio. He hosts the *Natch'l Blues* – Canada's longest running blues show now in its 31st year on Alberta-wide CKUA. And his *Saturday Night Blues* is broadcast coast to coast on CBC. His life-long, unflagging interest in the blues

The Almost Leather Band
 Australia Calling
 The Be Good Tanyas
 Blue Rodeo
 Ray Bonneville
 Chuck Brodsky
 The Burns Sisters
 Rita Chiarelli
 The Collective
 Cowboy Junkies
 Doug Cox
 Crash Test Dummies
 Danú
 Kris Demeanor
 Luke Doucet
 Maria Dunn
 Alejandro Escovedo
 Stephen Fearing
 Christine Fellows
 Finjan
 Archie Fisher
 Sue Foley
 Hadacol
 Sarah Harmer
 Mason Jennings
 Jerusalem Ridge with Betty McDaniel
 Carlos Del Junco
 James Keelaghan
 Kita
 Jess Klein
 Tom Landa & The Paperboys
 Colin Linden with Richard Bell
 Cara Luft
 The McDades
 Erin McKeown
 Nicky Mehta
 Danny Michel
 Montcorbier
 Nickel Creek
 Njava
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 Ojida
 Painting Daisies
 Fred Penner
 Les Petits Chanteurs du Granby
 Mike Plume Band
 The Puentes Brothers
 Mark Reeves
 Sandy Scofield
 Sonny Rhodes Blues Band
 Rudimental
 Kate Rusby
 Scrij MacDubb
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Tubthumping

reflects on his label roster. More than half of 25 *Years* features blues or blues-related performers.

"Personally, I think my tastes are pretty broad, but it's probably gone more towards blues because of certain opportunities that have come our way in the last two or three years. I'm still interested in all kind of roots music."

Planned or current projects include new releases from Maria Mulduar, Billy Boy Arnold, Rosco Gordon, Duke Robillard and Doug James, a sax player who has played on countless recording sessions backing the likes of Stevie Ray Vaughn, Big Joe Turner and Dr. John.

"As far as the future goes the plan is to keep a lid on the size of the company and the amount of releases. There are no plans to expand. If anything, I'd like to be even more selective and release even fewer records. We are trying to release 10 records a year and kind of keep it to that because that's what we can handle."

"You can only do so much. It's getting harder and harder and the market is shrinking with people's ability to download and all the entertainment options."

"It's very difficult to get records into stores in the States, especially. It's incredibly expensive. This is a huge problem. If we want to get a record into a chain, we have to buy that space and it usually costs \$1.50 up to \$4 U.S. for every record placed in these stores. And these companies will turn you down if they don't think your release is strong enough. But it's wonderful to be around for 25 years and to be a part of this. We've just had some wonderful experiences."

Olu looking at!

"Have you seen my pictures?
Have you seen my photograph? I
think that question is obvious,"
Roddy Campbell has a quiet word
with Olu Dara about his new
release, *Neighborhoods*.

Olu Dara is not a pleasant man to interview. Cantankerous, combative, curt — only God or the Devil knows why he bothers. Yet this 50-something-year-old multi-instrumentalist from Natchez, Mississippi, makes audaciously brilliant, genre-bending, recordings.

Jazz, blues, funk, beat poetry, calypso and African highlife all seamlessly integrate on his widely acclaimed debut, *In The World: From Natchez To New York*. His current release, *Neighborhoods*, offers an equally appealing hybrid. But how the inspiration and foresight transpired to ignite the phenomenal creativity



Olu Dara

that flows from Africa to America through these two discs, well, that will have to wait for another day.

"Have you seen my pictures? Have you seen my photograph? I think that question is obvious," says Dara.

Apparently, his African-American ancestry explains all. Me, I'm baffled. Since when did origins limit or justify ingenuity? Didn't suburban British, middle-class kids infatuated with the sounds of the Mississippi Delta transform pop into rock? Ancestry my arse.

"All this music I've been doing, I've been hearing since I've been here on earth. I don't know why people think it's eclectic, it's just music you hear if you're here on earth. I've been in the world that's why I called my first album *In The World*. If you're in the world you cannot fail to hear music, no matter if it's subliminal or if it's on television, movies, records or just through human-beings."

"It's out there if you listen. It belongs to everybody. You have to be able to grasp it and put it back out. The secret to it is hearing it and reproducing the sound. And that's the way it's done."

Dara, it seemed, sprang from nowhere in 1998 with the release of his universally acclaimed *In The World*. In reality, he has enjoyed a long, fruitful career composing for dance and drama as well as fronting his own band and performing with the likes of Art Blakey's Messengers. However, it took his son — multi-platinum selling rapper Nas — to convince Dara to make his debut disc.

"Well, he asked me to play on his label and I refused. I had no interest in recording a solo album because I recorded one 20 years ago and it was never released. I thought that was enough."

"It was just his suggestion, he wanted his father to be heard so people would know from whence he came. I had nothing else to do, so I

did it. That's the only reason."

Dara came from Natchez on the banks of the Mississippi River in what he describes as a nurturing environment. He took up the trumpet at seven. Eleven years later in 1959, he abandoned college and Mississippi to join the U.S. Navy. The navy, he reckoned, would allow him to see the world and pursue his music. And while he eventually settled in New York in 1963, foreign ports first exposed him to African music. Nothing too specific, mind.

"I heard the music of the people. When you go to Trinidad, you're going to hear Trinidadian music. If you go to Norfolk, Virginia, you're going to hear Virginian music. If you go to Nigeria, you are going to hear Nigerian music. So I just heard the music of the people. Just like coming to New Orleans, when I'm here, I hear the music of New Orleans. Wherever you are, you're going to hear the music of the people."

While the core support on *Neighborhoods* again comes from the Natchez Dance Band, this time around Dara has recruited help from such celebrities as Dr. John and Cassandra Wilson. Both come from around the Mississippi: "When I say Mississippi River that means we have a similar musical culture."

As riveting and adventurous as its predecessor, *Neighborhoods* features several highlights including a potential hit single wrapped in the big band, hypnotic funk of *I See The Light*. There's also the sparse, entrancing, acoustic *Tree Blues* and a simple but wonderful cover of the traditional Bahamian folk song, *Out On The Rolling Sea*, popularized by Joseph Spence.

"I had done this song with a play I had written many years ago. My producer, Yves Beauvais, had heard me sing it once and suggested that I do it. I had never heard of Joseph Spence. I wanted to hear what he sounded like after I recorded it, so I went and found his record. My impressions were very positive. He's one of the people in the world that sing with a nice feeling and has a nice cultural feel to his music."

Several tracks for *Neighborhoods* were written on the spot. Seemingly, not much of a challenge for Dara who frequently composes on demand when writing for plays.

"I'm a musician — that's my job. If you go to the doctor and say, 'Fix my finger,' he's going to fix it on the spot. And if you go to a mechanic to fix your car, he'll fix your car. Music's just another profession."

"There's no challenge in music. Music is what I do. I've been doing music since I was seven years old; it's no challenge at all. It's just something you do for your own enjoyment and for the enjoyment of the people. I just do the music and let the people decide whether they like it or not."

Tubthumping

Harpinger

Sarnia, Ontario's, Mike Stevens was made a Kentucky Colonel – an honor bestowed by the State of Kentucky – for pioneering the harmonica in bluegrass. Bob Remington finds him nursing his injuries.

Mike Stevens does not suck. He blows. Hard. Really, really hard. So hard that he has ruptured intestines (five times) and injured his esophagus.

The latter occurred while rehearsing a collection of complex Canadian fiddle tunes for his latest album, *The World is Only Air (And A Very Dangerous Hat)*.

"My esophagus was really out of whack," says the Canadian harmonica man. "My Adams apple swelled up and I wasn't swallowing so good. I lost my voice for a five week period."

Stevens, a Sarnia, Ont., native, is one of the world's leading harmonica players, hailed as a pioneer for his originality and forays into virtually every musical genre. Best known for

his groundbreaking work playing bluegrass harmonica with the legendary Jim and Jesse, Stevens was automatically retired from eligibility for Entertainer of the Year at the Central Canadian Bluegrass Awards after winning the honor five consecutive years.

As a pioneer of bluegrass harmonica, it wasn't that much of a leap to Canadian fiddle music. Stevens was attracted by the odd timings and overall complexity of the tunes, many of them classics played by practitioners of old-time and down-East fiddling. Their key-change structure makes them especially challenging on harmonica, forcing most players to use two harmonicas or one diatonic harmonica. Stevens, naturally, chose the latter, more difficult method.

Blown guts, injured throat, intentionally choosing music that is difficult to play – to his reputation as an innovator, teacher and award winner, Stevens can add "glutton for punishment."

"There must be something in my past that makes me want to punish myself like this," he admits.

Growing up close to the Detroit radio market, Stevens was inundated with the blues as a kid. "I loved Son House's music. I love the blues. It cuts you right to the quick."



'You ain't nuthin' but a hounddog' — Mike Stevens

He also liked old string-band music and got turned on to bluegrass, the blues' hillbilly cousin, through a gospel bluegrass album given to him by his parents after a trip they made to Nashville. It was while playing with some progressive Ontario bluegrass bands in the 1980s that Stevens fell in with some top American bluegrass acts.

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Tubthumping

At the big Carlisle, Ont., bluegrass festival in 1988 he was invited on stage by the Lewis Family, and through them he met bluegrass stars Jim and Jesse McReynolds.

Jesse, a mandolin innovator credited with the development of crosspicking – a style that emulates the finger roll on the five-string banjo – took a shine to this fellow innovator's courage at attempting bluegrass on harmonica. Like Stevens, Jesse McReynolds likes challenging material, as any mandolin player attempting his cross-picking version of *Dill Pickle Rag* can attest.

Stevens did some 300 Grand Old Opry shows with Jim and Jesse and practically worships the mandolin master.

"I learned so much from him. I studied his style and his breaks. He's a monster. I have so much respect for him."

Bringing harmonica into the often stubborn world of bluegrass is no mean feat, and not everyone in the genre is keen on the intrusion. Yet even bluegrass founder Bill Monroe, whose views on how the music should be played were often dogmatic, jammed with Stevens backstage at the Opry.

Stevens was also made a Kentucky

Colonel – an honor bestowed by the State of Kentucky – for pioneering the instrument in bluegrass.

His first solo recording, *Harmonica*, won the 1990 Bluegrass Recording of the Year for Central Canada. Subsequent recordings have been difficult to confine in a particular genre, given Steven's fondness for blues, bluegrass, country, ska, Asian Gamelan and Middle Eastern styles.

Stevens began delving in Canadian fiddle tunes – stuff like *Hangman's Reel*, *Big John MacNeal*, *Reel-Point-a-Pick* – about 2½ years ago before putting them on *The World is Only Air*, which was recorded in one marathon session on vintage microphones.

"I never heard a harmonica player play them. Harp players play around them with chords and stuff, but never really get inside them. I began learning them bit by bit. I like to find songs that seem impossible to play and try to break them down."

"I feel strongly about the Canadian aspect of it. I have a bit of a profile in the U.S. so, who knows, maybe some Americans will start playing Canadian fiddle music."

Stevens' throat injury occurred while try-

ing to learn the tunes. The album includes a ska version of *The Growling Old Man* and the *Grumbling Old Woman*, a French Canadian fiddle classic.

"I have to take in such a crushing volume of air to play them that I actually stretched something in my throat. The good news is that things eventually came back even stronger than before and now I'm OK."

Stevens has his harmonicas specially tuned in Chicago by Joe Filisko, who is selective in his clients.

"They are altered so when I'm really leaning on them I can shape them a bit. A normal player would try one of mine and think it sounds terrible."

Stevens' style has been emulated by younger players from instruction books done by Hal Leonard Publications.

"I'm credited with a certain style of play and now I have all these people nipping at my heels with a technique that took me a lifetime. It's flattering, really. There are some really good players coming up. I think in the next 10 years you're going to see the harmonica explode. I really believe that. So I try to keep pushing myself to stay ahead of the game."

In The Tradition

La Volée d'Castors expand the boundaries of their Quebecois musical heritage. Jay Knutson hears how.

"Tradition" is a word that is defined and spelled the same in both English and French. It is also a word that keeps popping up in conversation with Quebec's La Volée d'Castors.

Their name comes from a regional gag, "*Regard la volée d'castors*." It loses something in the translation but it means, "Hey, look at that flock of beavers." If you look, the joke's on you.

Their sound is firmly rooted in a musical heritage – one of the voyageurs, of settlement, of a new land, and of an array of styles and customs handed down through the ages.

Réjean Brunet is the bassist for the band. He carries the tradition passed along to him from his father and mother, both musicians.

He started to play at the age of five. Like most of the kids in the Joliette region of Quebec, he learned the songs like nursery rhymes. Chanson a repond is a call, answer, vocal tradition that existed there prior to confederation.

This vocal style formed the basis of his group. It also carried over to his brother Andre, who now plays violin with La Bottine Souriante.



"It is the business of music that takes you further and further from the tradition. The audience is who we choose to work for."

– Réjean Brunet, La Volée d'Castors

Tubthumping

When Brunet showed a certain aptitude for music, he was enrolled in formal lessons. In his words, he wanted to understand music beyond that of "an imperfect tradition."

But the rhythms and melodies of his youth were always close to his heart. After playing with his brother at some local festivals, he discovered they were not alone in their love of traditional music.

Nicolas Froment, Sébastien Parent and Martin Mailhot were performing with the dance troupe Les Petits Pas Jacadiens. They had also been moving in a traditional direction, so it only seemed natural that they should join forces with Brunet. With the addition of classically trained violinist Mathieu Lacas and accordion player Frédéric Bourgeois, the lineup was complete.

Eight years and three albums later, the band is still moving to fulfill its mandate.

Earlier in their career, they paraded their roots and interpretive skills with a fusion of Quebecois and Celtic songs and instrumentals. Acadian tunes offer similarities to Irish. Many songs share the same melodies but with different rhythms, accents and titles.

Jamming with the Irish band Danú at the Vancouver Folk Festival two years ago gave La Volée d'Castors some insight to where they could take things musically.

"We heard many different ways of approaching common tunes," Brunet says.

"We started to explore moving away from the square beat, and moving towards incorporating different time signatures.

"A friend of ours, Jean-François Bélanger, returned from a trip to India. He brought back many stories and a grasp of Indian music which we were fascinated by."

Their newest release *VDC* finds an evolution, one that comes with the confidence and understanding of playing with one another for many years. There is a unique sound emerging – an exploration of acoustic and electric stylings. There's also a solid display of exuberant musicianship and vocal strength.

Never straying too far from their roots, they have embarked on a journey through other cultural influences. Traces of Persian and Eastern European sounds infiltrate several of the new tracks. A sitar is united with accordion and violin. The rhythms have adopted a whole new syncopation, a difficult translation for even the most adventurous clogger.

Brunet explains this as a natural development. "We didn't want to change the character or finesse of the instrumentation. But we have opened up to all sorts of different forms of music. We create our own borders. Now we want to transcend those barriers."

This attitude also applies to their touring. The band realizes the restrictions of working too frequently in their own backyard.

"La Bottine Souriante has pushed open

the door for us to Europe. We have toured through Spain, and this year we will go to Scandinavia. Language has not been a problem. I don't think many of them speak French, but in Europe they are very used to different languages. It is the music they relate to."

Isn't it ironic that only here in Canada does this become a touchy issue.

"It's only the agents, managers and record companies that seem to have a problem with singing in French in the west of Canada. They don't feel it will sell enough records or draw enough people to the shows.

"It is the business of music that takes you further and further from the tradition, the audience is who we choose to work for."

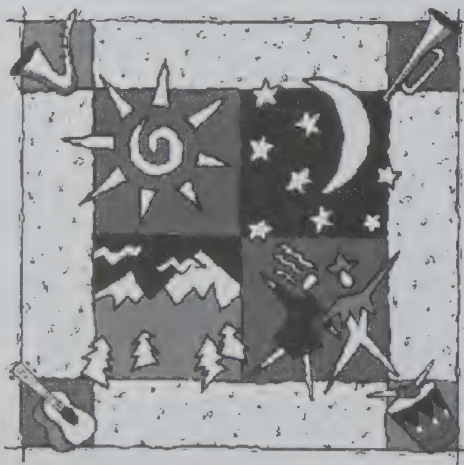
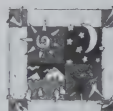
The new album offers ample evidence. Songs such as *8e Cote*, *Revenez donc toutes/La Debacle*, *Fille mariée nouvelle-ment/Le decalage*, or *Le feuillard/Rail Reel* do jump over those barriers and seamlessly meld the music of several different cultures.

It gets exiting when a band reaches a point, where the music comes into its own and the barriers fall. La Volée d'Castors are standing at the edge, ready to take a big plunge – to abandon their day jobs. Froment is a teacher, Bourgeois works for an electronics firm.

"It is our goal to be able to play music around the world, to play for a living. We want to play with as many people as possible, to keep things fresh and keep progressing."

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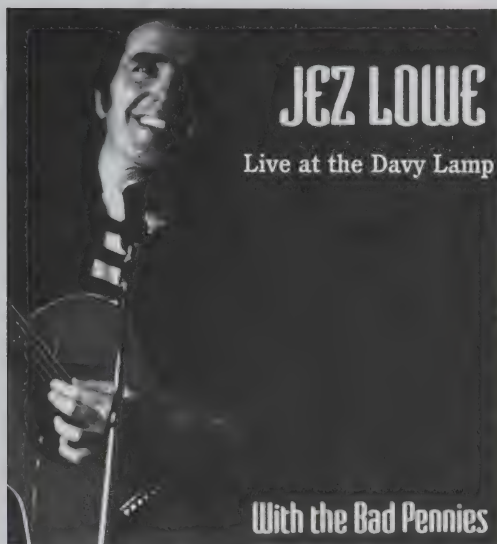


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Win Jez Lowe's double CD



The nice people at Tantobie Records have sent us six copies of Jez Lowe's new double CD, *Live At The Davy Lamp*, recorded with his band the Bad Pennies. For this recording, Jez returned to his old-stomping grounds — the popular club held weekly at the Biddick Arts Centre in Washington, Tyne and Wear, England, known as the Davy Lamp. The performance captured there features 23 songs spanning his two decades as a songwriter. To win *Live At The Davy Lamp* answer the following questions:

1. What fossil fuel is mentioned in several of Jez's songs?
2. Who was Jez's initial hurdy-gurdy-playing partner?
3. Name two instruments, besides the guitar, that Jez plays.

Please send your answers on the back of a postcard to *Penguin Eggs*, 10942 80 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, T6G 0R1. Or e-mail us at penguineggs@hotmail.com prior to August 1.

The six winners of the Paperboys' Postcards contest from Issue No. 9 are: Doug Provine, Cincinnati, OH, Gail Buente, Vancouver, BC, John Mathews, Lucan, ON, Bruce Meredith, Courtice, ON, Rene Lassard, Edmonton, AB, Paul Gaudet, Bridgewater, NS. The answers are:

- 1: Spirit of the West's Labour Day
- 2: Danny Greenspoon
- 3: I've Just Seen A Face

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The Crawl

Capot to 2nd fret
Open D tuning

Jay Knutson / Geoffrey Kelly / John Mann

Well we're

good old boys we come from the North Shore. Drinkers and carousers, the

likes you've never seen. And this night by God, we

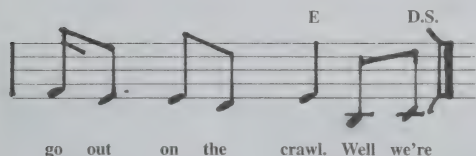
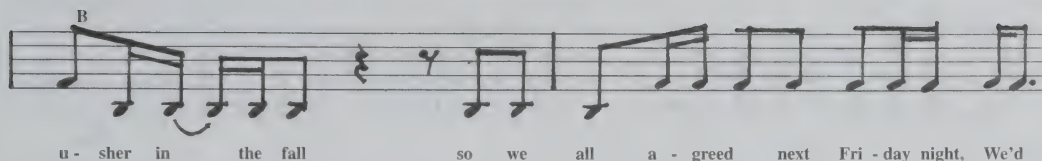
drank 'till there was no more, From the trol-ler to the Ra-ven with

all stops in be-tween

It all be-gun one af-ter-noon on the

shore of Am-ble-side. We were sit-ting there quite pea-c'ful-ly with the

ri-sing of the tide, When an i-de-a it came to mind for to



VERSES:

We Planned to have a gay old time the cash we did not spare
 So we left all the cars at home and paid the taxi fare
 I got out to Horseshoe Bay just a little after five
 From a table in the corner, I heard familiar voices rise
 (chorus)

Spirits they ran high that night, old stories we did share
 Of the days when we were younger men and didn't have a care
 The beer flowed like a river and we drank the keg near dry
 So we drained down all our glasses and were thirsty bye and bye
 (chorus)

Park Royal Hotel, The Rusty Gull, Square Rigger and Queens Cross
 We started out with eight good boys but half had gotten lost
 You'll never keep the lads together, when their eyes begin to rove
 So there was just the three of us that made it to Deep Cove

(chorus)

We arrived out at The Raven just in time for the last call
 The final destination of this the first annual crawl
 We dug deep into our pockets, there was no money to be found
 Nine miles home and for walking we are bound.

Our thanks

Penguin Eggs is determined to cultivate and strengthen an interest in traditional-based music in Canada. Printing *The Crawl* is the first step. While written by Spirit of the West for their trail-blazing disc *Tripping Up The Stairs*, it is very much steeped in the tradition. It's also fun to sing. Much thanks to Geoffrey Kelly, John Mann and Jay Knutson for allowing us its use. Thanks also to Jay and Claude Giguère for the transcription, and to Alix Bean who wrote out the notes by hand after electronic difficulties.

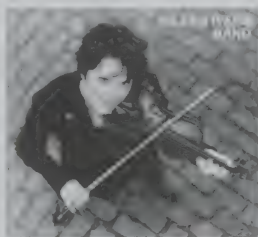


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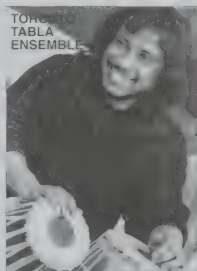
Fraser River
 Heritage Park
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Global Warming

Michael Brook, the former guitarist with Martha and the Muffins, has evolved into one of the most celebrated producers of world music. Peter Gabriel certainly admires the chap. Roddy Campbell charts Brook's progress amidst revered Qawwali singers and dudak virtuosos.

Name checking Michael Brook ordinarily produces looks of utter bewilderment. Despite collaborating with U2's The Edge, recording Sinead O'Connor's first tentative studio steps, overseeing the death knell of the Pogues, and producing Youssou N'Dour, Toronto born Brook remains largely an unknown entity.

Mention him, however, in the same breath as Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, the late Qawwali singer from Pakistan, and suddenly heads nod, smiles appear. Gotcha!

Qawwali is the mystical, devotional poetry of Sufi Muslims set to music. And at the behest of Peter Gabriel and Real World records, Brook, the former guitarist with Martha And The Muffins, produced Khan's innovative and highly influential *Mustt Mustt*, then collaborated on the Grammy-nominated *Nightsong*.

These discs elevated Khan's status from a relatively regional phenomenon to truly international recognition. Subsequently, he appeared on the sound tracks of *Natural Born Killers* and *Dead Man Walking*, the latter singing with Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder. And in the U.K., Real World released *Star Rise, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan & Michael Brook: Remixed*, featuring such linchpins of Britain's flourishing Asian underground as Asian Dub Foundation, Talvin Singh and Black Star Liner.

Much to the consternation of Qawwali purists, *Mustt Mustt* gave Khan a contemporary nudge by including a remix of the title track by British dance celebs, Massive Attack.

"Nusrat was very open to musical experimentation," says Brook during an early morning break while recording in Los Angeles.

"He had done, in my opinion, some fairly cheesy collaborations in the past. But he didn't seem to be bothered by that because his focus was on the singing and the singing was always great. I think he also felt, to a certain extent, he was a man with a mission, to spread Qawwali. And I don't think it mattered if he was backed by a cheesy synth and drum machine.

"It was sort of like, it didn't matter if you preached in the ghetto or in the mansion. Not that he was proselytizing very much, or at all. But I think there is a spiritual element to his singing and I think he felt that his job was just to sing.



Michael Brook and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan

"But just as a point of reference, you know the old saying when you're up to your ass in alligators you forget you're there to drain the swamp. I was trying to make a recording and capture good performances of Nusrat in a kind of non-traditional musical environment.

"It's interesting for me, I don't strategize about this stuff very much. It's always dive in and see what happens. There's a lot of experimenting. And I think goal-seeking is fairly unconscious. It's more trying to get good stuff. That's always my goal. Maybe I'll have some fairly unconscious awareness of what sort of character that might take but a lot of time, it's just, 'Let's make it sound good.'"

Khan and Brook wrote all eight tracks on *Nightsong* and moved Qawwali closer still to Western influences but without losing its potency. It also featured Brook's invention, the Infinite Guitar. Three Infinite Guitars exist. Brook owns one, Daniel Lanois an other, and The Edge has the third. It opens U2's anthem *I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For*. Essentially, this instrument simulates what comes through a loud guitar amplifier and starts playing by itself, hence the term infinite.

"It kind of came out of an interest in

adding more ornamentation to guitar melody. Mostly guitar is a percussive instrument: the note dies out. And so I wanted to be more like a voice or a violin. It does that."

Besides his technical and instrumental contributions, Brook also had more of a handle on Khan's music. *Mustt Mustt* saw to that. Western music moves from verse to chorus after eight bars. Qawwali songs, he discovered, are much more fluid and only change when the singer is content with the effort given to the verse.

"On the backing tracks I prepared for Nusrat for *Mustt Mustt*, I had put sectional changes in and that always threw him because he was just getting going. So for *Nightsong*, I prepared very long sections which didn't change to allow him to get up a head of steam. So there would be fifteen of seventeen minutes of just one thing. And then on another tape there would be the chorus and it would be all edited together."

Sadly, Qawwali's undisputed master died of a heart attack in London, in August 1997, just as he and Brook prepared for a world tour that included prestigious stops at New York's Carnegie Hall and London's Royal Albert Hall. Tributes poured in from around the

"A great singer, and very, very determined to make something happen. We talked about me producing her first solo album. She'd done a bunch of demos and I thought some of them were a bit clichéd and told her that. Then she did her album [*The Lion And The Cobra*] and it was a lot like her demos. It was clichéd. What can I say. She followed her vision but it wasn't my taste."

— Michael Brook's first impressions of Sinéad O'Connor

globe. Peter Gabriel, quoted in *Folk Roots* magazine said, "I have never heard so much spirit in a voice. My two main singing inspirations, Nusrat and Otis Redding, have been the supreme examples of how far and deep a voice can go in finding, touching and moving the soul."

"He had this mysterious, essential quality that had an universal appeal for people," says Brook. "Nobody understood any of the words, unless you were from his country. And yet there was this universal feel, it was a very intriguing thing."

"I think as a person, and I don't mean to belittle that side of him, he wasn't a strong personality except in his singing. He was like a nerd in a certain way. Unless he was singing, he was on low simmer."

Michael Brook was born in Toronto's General Hospital. His grandfather, father, brother, great aunt and aunt were architects. Life in an office held little appeal for the young Brook. Besides architectural projects took years to complete — much longer than records.

"Yeah, unless you're Peter Gabriel."

Musicians the Brook family were not. Michael, though, dabbled with guitar. His initial attraction was blues-based rock but the post punk euphoria that swept through Toronto in the late seventies and early eighties caught up with him and a fair deal of commercial success came his way with Martha and the Muffins.

"I was involved mostly with touring with them, and it was a lot of fun. I hadn't done a lot of pop band touring before so it was a good experience. It was sort of 23 hours of waiting for one hour of work. It was fun and I liked doing it. And I like touring still."

But Brook's musical interests extended well beyond the confines of pop. While at York University, he focused on interdisciplinary courses: the psychology of perception in the arts, vision and hearing, electronics, electronic music, biofeedback. His major changed every year. And though he never graduated, he wound up as a teaching assistant in the electronic music department.

There he met American lecturer, avant garde composer and trumpeter Jon Hassell, an acquaintance of Brian Eno. Brook eventually played on and engineered Hassell's 1976 album, *Vernal Equinox*, which they recorded at Daniel Lanois' studio at the insistence of Eno. Almost a decade later Brook released his debut album, *Hybrid*. Essentially, it's an ambient

disc with Indian and Arabic melodies grafted to its core.

"When I first heard little bits of Indian music, there was something about it I found very attractive that I didn't hear in the music around me. I think some of it was the ornamentation and the expression that was put into one note — the bending and all that stuff."

He now describes the largely ignored *Hybrid* as noisy, but a good reflection of his tastes at the time. It included guest spots from both Eno and Lanois. They would introduce Brook to The Edge and together they worked on the soundtrack of *Captive* — a disc that featured the recording debut of Sinéad O'Connor.

"A great singer, and very, very determined to make something happen. We talked about me producing her first solo album. She'd done a bunch of demos and I thought some of them were a bit clichéd and told her that. Then she did her album [*The Lion And The Cobra*] and it was a lot like her demos. It was clichéd. What can I say. She followed her vision but it wasn't my taste. But those sessions were fun and it was exciting working with The Edge. He's a great guy, very open minded."

As a producer, Brook tries to approach each project with a fresh light, looking for

strengths never before highlighted. He also considers himself a competent taste arbitrator. And these attributes first earned him widespread recognition in 1988 with *Miss America*, the wonderful, and sadly, only complete album recorded by Toronto's Mary Margaret O'Hara, released worldwide by Virgin records.

"She's a pretty troubled person, emotionally. She just finds life pretty hard to cope with, you know. But I think that comes through in the music. And that is part of the magic. It's not fake."

"The album had been through a number of alliterations that ranged from quite straight ahead pop to deep experimental. I kind of guided it into harbor. We rerecorded about half of it and reworked existing material. She's such an amazing talent. Unbelievable. But it was hard for her to get through the album."

Virgin then approached Brook to produce Senegal's superstar Youssou N'Dour, who had made a huge impact in the West performing with Bruce Springsteen, Tracy Chapman, Sting and Gabriel on the Human Rights Now world tour. To prepare for what eventually became *Set*, Brook went to hear N'Dour perform in his home base, Dakar.

"I just thought, 'Man, they are so amazing live that we have to have the band playing together.' And you know at that time it was



Djivan Gasparyan and Michael Brook

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very fashionable to do everything over-dubbed – lay down the drums and bass, guitars, all that stuff. I was new to the game and so I was a bit nervous about it all. But I really liked the album. My only regret was I don't speak French because I could really have connected with Yousof a bit better. But still, I think the album is beautiful."

Peter Gabriel, always on the lookout for something different, had by now latched onto *Hybrid*. With its Asian influences, he suspected Brook might push Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan in new directions. And so Michael Brook was brought into the Real World fold where he would work on various projects throughout the next decade. These included collaborating with Djivan Gasparyan, the acknowledged master of the Armenian duduk – an ancient oboe-like wind instrument.

"It's just amazing how somebody can play such a simple instrument and make it so very, very emotional."

Although curbed now because of rising costs, one of the past delightful attributes of Real World was its recording week. Performers with uniquely distinctive cultural backgrounds gathered at Gabriel's studios in the English countryside for seven intense days of making albums. Frequently they would collaborate with extraordinary results. Brook cites his collaboration with Indian electric man-

dolinist U. Srinivas on the disc *Dream* as a case in point. It features spontaneous contributions from the likes of English classical violinist Nigel Kennedy and Canadian singer-songwriter Jane Siberry.

"This is an example of the good things about recording week. The original mandate was to record a traditional album [U. Srinivas] only. And then I thought, 'I've got some equipment here and I think I could make up some stuff for Srinivas to play on and maybe we could make a collaborative album.' And really, that was decided that day. Scrounging studio time and setting up a little studio in a corner, it was very spontaneous and probably only a recording week type experience."

In recent years, he has also worked with the Irish, Gaelic, *sian nos* singer Larla O Lionáird – the voice of the Afro Celt Soundsystem. And does Mr Brook approve of the Afro Celt's vibrant mix of African and Celtic rhythms raked over a bed of dance beats and samples?

"I don't disapprove. I've seen them live three or four times and it's just a fantastic show. From the stuff I've heard on the albums. I think it's okay. But it's not as strong as the live stuff. I think it's the visuals. I think it's kind of a theater experience. I don't mean to poo poo it because there's stuff I've heard that

I like. But I have to say this, the listening experience is not stronger than the live."

And speaking of things remotely Celtic: when the trailblazing Pogues sacked principal songwriter Shane MacGowan in the early nineties, the remnants, rather than fold their tent and move on, decided on one more kick at the can. Their disappointing swan song became *Waiting For Herb* – producer, Michael Brook.

"There was still a lot of turbulence caused by Shane's departure. So they were searching for a new identity, but not a totally new one. I think Spider [Stacy] was under a lot of pressure to be the lead singer and in many ways that wasn't his ambition. And so it was very hard on him. There were a lot of things pulling them apart. James [Fearley] the accordion player had moved to L.A. Terry [Woods] was living in Ireland. So they were scattered. And so it was a struggle, not so much that people were unpleasant or anything, it was logistically a difficult thing to do."

As for current collaborations, Brook is currently at work on a new album by Tanzanian singer and multi-instrumentalist Hukwe Zawose for Real World.

"It's him and his nephew Charles [Zawose] with Marie Daule of Zap Mama singing, which is just amazing. It's just so good. I'm so excited about it."



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Michael Brook

The Penguin Eggs Interview

On a Wing and a Player

Eliza Carthy, daughter of Martin Carthy and Norma Waterson, returns with *Angels And Cigarettes*, her first solo album since releasing the award-winning *Red Rice* — a double disc of English traditional music and song. Steve Edge poses the questions.

Penguin Eggs: Let's talk about the new album, *Angels And Cigarettes*. Is it fair to call it a pop album?

Eliza Carthy: Definitely.

That's the word you would use?

It is, yeah. I wouldn't call it a folk album. It's funny. When we're on the road I feel like we're a rock band. I do. But I wouldn't call the album a rock album. It doesn't have that live feel. I think if the music was live on it I might call it rock. It's not folk-rock. So a pop album is the closest I can get to it really. The thing that characterizes a pop album is the flag you nail to your mast. That was the hardest thing for me because I like loads of different kinds of music.

***Perfect* has almost a Caribbean feel and a steel guitar. How did the arrangements develop?**

Perfect was a funny one, actually, because I was sent to my room when we were recording the album in Brighton: "Go away to your room and write me a very simple song."

"Okay." I had the words for *Perfect* and wrote this little piece on the guitar for it. A lot of the songs started from a riff from Ben [Ivitsky] the guitar player, or lyrics to bits and pieces of ideas, but not *Perfect*. And when B.J. [Cole] came to the studio he said, "Ooow, put some slide guitar in this bit, it'll be lovely." And it was fantastic.

What attracted you to Paul Weller's *Wildwood*?

The words are really, really amazing. The words are very satisfying to sing and the emotion behind it is very convincing, very emphatic. So I really liked that about it. I'm always attracted to words and it's a very heartfelt song. I guess that's it. It's more of an American bluesier tune than I would normally go for and I think that attracted me as well.

How did Van Dyke Parks get involved with the string arrangements?



Eliza Carthy

I met Van Dyke Parks through the Harry Smith Anthology concert put on at the Southbank in London. There were lots of different musicians there like Jarvis Croker and Beth Orton. And Van Dyke was there with the Mondriaan String Quartet. But it's bit by bit that I got to know what he's about. It was a coincidence that the A&R man who signed me to Warners, Andrew Wickham, had been very closely involved with Van Dyke's Warner's records. I think he produced one of them. Andrew was very happy that I met Van Dyke and asked if I wanted any string arrangements on the album. And we said, "Yes!"

How would you compare *Angels &*

***Cigarettes* to *Red Rice*?**

Red Rice was really a showcase of the two things I was doing at the time. It was two albums. The acoustic album was mostly English traditional material with a few tune compositions. Very nice. Loads of fiddle tunes. It's really pretty. *Rice* was my band which, I suppose, was doing folk-rock at the time. But again, the material was all English traditional stuff. It was like folk-rock as opposed to the more acoustic side of the scene. I think I wanted to represent both halves. I wanted to make a modern album that sounded like basically what the British folk scene sounded like at the time. I think the main difference between

Angels and Cigarettes is that *Red Rice* is a lot more raw, natural sounding, live sounding, in a lot of ways.

There are two sides to Eliza Carthy. You play a lot of traditional music, and it's obviously an important part of your life, but the new stuff you're writing is in a pop vein. Is it natural to switch from one to the other or is not really a conscious decision?

It is a conscious switch. It's not forced or anything like that. I feel like I want to do both, but I don't want to do both at the same time. This is my theory, if I was going out there and performing gigs for instance where one minute I'd be doing *Poor Little Me*, which is full on drums, and keyboards, and backing vocals, and everything and it's steaming along, if I was doing that one minute and playing a set of gigs the next, I would feel really strange. It would be weird. You have to be in the right mindset for that. I don't want to confuse the audience. What I want is people to come and discover my band – the pop phenomenon – come and see the pop thing and hear me talk about traditional music, and hear me talk about it in the press, and think, "I'm going to investigate this."

I went and checked out Kate Rusby's web site the other day, and I'm not going to slag it in any way, but it mentions something that happened to me and that is somebody comes up to you and goes, "I hate folk music but I love you and I love what you do." She had it as part of an advertisement, which is fine. But for me, I find that really upsetting because I don't want somebody to hate folk music and love me. I want somebody to come and be a fan of me and understand I come from a folk music background. I want people to listen to other people. I want them to listen to... Fred Jordan, for God's sake (laughs). I want them to listen to Shooenliffy. I want them to listen to

"I was really quite horrible to me dad. Like his MBE, for instance, was petitioned for by the Scots. He spent a long time translating a lot of these impenetrable Scots ballads and making them really singable. Like *Prince Heathen*. And I remember at the point I realized that was what he was doing rather than English stuff, I gave him some hard words. I'm not saying I was right, but I was like, 'Come on dad, we have to do the English thing. We have to be vocal about that; it's important.'"

Chris Wood. I want them to listen to Martyn Bennett. I want them to listen to anybody but me because I'm not representative, but I know that is what inspired me. It's not a selfish thing I want people to listen to folk music. I answered this questionnaire on folking.com recently. It was, "What do you want to be remembered for? Do you want to be remembered as the person who returned English folk music to the people." No. I don't. I want to be remembered as a good musician. But I want somebody else because at the moment there's only me and Kate and it's really bloody lonely. I want more peers. I want to feel part of a scene.

That's interesting because I thought there were lots of people playing traditional music in Britain?

There's lots of people playing traditional music but there's hardly anyone playing tradi-

tional English music. Everybody is into playing French music, or Quebecois music, or Scottish music, or Irish music, or Scandinavian music. And they all do it very well, thank you very much. But nobody's playing English music.

When you're talking about English traditional music, you've got to start and finish with Martin Carthy, you can't ignore him.

I was really quite horrible to me dad. Like his MBE, for instance, was petitioned for by the Scots. He spent a long time translating a lot of these impenetrable Scots ballads and making them really singable. Like *Prince Heathen*. And I remember at the point I realized that was what he was doing rather than English stuff, I gave him some hard words. I'm not saying I was right, but I was like, "Come on dad, we have to do the English thing. We have to be vocal about that; it's important."

I don't know. Maybe we shouldn't be trying. Maybe the English don't even exist. They always say that the actual true English, the people who inhabited England historically, are the Irish and the Scots now. Not only that, but England has always been a multicultural society because it always has been a passing through point to places like Greenland and Norway. Maybe nobody every wanted to live in Milton Keynes. Maybe we don't exist. My family are Irish. They were Irish 70 years ago. That's not very long ago.

It's interesting my ideas on this are always changing. There are many, many unique things about English music like hornpipes in 3/2 timing for instance, 9/4 hornpipes. There's a great period in the sort of late 1500s to the 1730-50, or something like that, where there's a whole load of really unique music that nobody plays anymore apart from the French and the Quebecois.





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"What fun is it doing the same songs everyone else is doing in exactly the same way? This idea of doing the definitive version of something: rubbish. That's not what folk music is about."

You've certainly done as much if not more than anybody else to champion the cause of English music, and finding that stuff that has been lost to our ears, so well done for that.

Thank you. And I'm still doing it. What I would love to do is use my other skills, my skills as a singer-songwriter, my skills as a performer — I'm a really good performer, I really enjoy it, and I know that I can hold a tune, and I've got a good band and all these basic things — and use that to publicize traditional music and to make something of it and go, "Excuse me, Celtic music isn't the only folk music in the world if you don't mind."

If I can make people aware of that, that would be actually returning something to the scene in a really tangible way. Because the only way for folk music to remain current and interesting is for people who have never come across it before to discover it and go, "Wow!"

Like Bill Jones. Nobody's heard of Bill Jones. She hears folk music and thinks that'll be a great thing to take up, takes up the accordion, decides to return to all these traditional songs, and all of a sudden she's on the cover of Folk Roots.

Of course she is, because she came from nowhere. We need that. We need new blood. We need new ideas. The folk scene needs it because you just end up spiralling in on yourself.

What fun is it doing the same songs everyone else is doing in exactly the same way? This idea of doing the definitive version of something: rubbish. That's not what folk music is about. The idea is that you discover something, that is a blank page and you make it you. You put it in your mouth and then somebody else hears it and goes, "Yeah, I like that but I don't like that verse. I'll write a different verse and it'll be a different ending." Somebody else takes it up and it's in their mouth. That is the point. It's not everybody doing copies of songs from somebody else's album, that's bollocks. It's boring.

Let's talk about growing up in the Waterson-Carthy household, was it full of music all the time?

Well yeah, but the thing you have to remember with the period of the eighties, my dad was away a lot of the time and me mum gave up music, apart from the summertime, to look after me. Holidays were great. Weekends were fantastic. I don't feel bad about it — you know, "I never had a dad," or anything like that. On the contrary, it made me very excited.

My dad used to come back with his arms full of presents and these amazing stories.

Were you always singing around the house with your mother?

Yeah, definitely. That's the good stuff I remember. And Blue Murder [a combination of Swan Arcade and the Watsons] coming around to rehearse. That was incredible. I remember them sitting around the table. They would be like, "Ooo, rehearsals all week." And then they'd just get pissed and sit around the table and sing all their favorite songs, you know. They used to do every song you could possibly imagine that had a rousing chorus.

When did you decide to become a performer? Martin [Carthy] said it was at the folk festival here in Vancouver?

Well I did. It was a turning point. I'd been interested. I thought about it. I'd done a couple of things. But it really was Vancouver that did it for me just because I'd practically never been out of the country prior to that point. I never experienced anything like that before, not only the sunshine and the beautiful setting and the huge crowds, but it was the first time I'd seen Rory McLeod and that has got to be a religious experience, you know what I mean. It was opening my eyes to the world. I'd had such a horrible experience in Whitby. It's not that Whitby's such a horrible place. It's a very small-minded place in a way a tourist area could be. I just had a horrible time there for being different.

So what's next for Eliza Carthy? Are you going to pursue the pop direction or keep treading in both worlds?

I want to make some more albums like this, like I'm doing right now. I've got a lot more to say, actually, and I'm learning the way to say it. I'm really happy about that. I'm an opinionated so and so. I just want to be able to internalize my part of what I do with folk music for the moment. It's like I say go find somebody else to do that for now and hopefully give it a few years and I'll come back to it.

I'm not stopping either, I've got the Waterson Carthy, thing, we're going to make an album by the end of the year. Me and Martin Green have made an album together. It's his solo album with me producing. I want to write at least another album with me own songs and to keep ploughing on gently pushing the English traditional thing as much as I possibly can. It's important.

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She may be a child of the MTV age, but Shemekia Copeland's roots are clearly in another time and place.

The House of Blues

Shemekia Copeland grew up in Harlem nurtured by her father's friends Big Mamma Thorton and Koko Taylor. Helen Metella recounts the rise of Johnny Copeland's daughter.

IT SEEMS everything in Shemekia Copeland's universe is ruled by larger-than-average dimensions.

During her winter concert tour, her Edmonton performance takes place inside a hangar-sized hall braced by massive cement trusses. Brutally, the cement bounces the sound around, reconfiguring it as waves of boomy roar. One can't help but wonder if the awful acoustics will defeat a relatively unknown singer who is younger than almost everyone in this crowd of avid blues fans.

But before she opens her mouth, it's apparent this 22-year-old possesses a prodigious

share of self-assurance. An amply-built black woman, Copeland sashays to centre stage dressed in sprayed-on pants and a body-hugging top covered in shiny beads sewn in a horizontal striped pattern – an effect most stylists would discourage.

Perched on spike-heeled boots and tossing her dyed blond hair back from her microphone, she somehow manages to evoke Tina Turner's uninhibited body carriage and abundant moxie.

Copeland is confidence writ large. Then, there's the voice. Deep and thick, energetic and loud, it is a marvel of breath control. As

she stretches her last notes into robust whorls, even the room's blasted echoes seem cowed, as if by a superior power.

Big. That's the word that springs to mind over and over, and not in a pejorative fashion. She is going to be big. As in famous. But how did she develop into such a force, so young?

Part of the answer lies in her stage patter. Early into her set, Copeland reveals, "A good friend once told me, 'Girl, if you wanna sing the blues, you gotta bring it out from your toes.' I said, 'Miss Taylor, I'll try my best.'"

That would be Koko Taylor she's referring to. The gravelly voiced blues singer from

Chicago. Taylor is a peer of Shemekia's father, Johnny Copeland, the exuberant Houston-raised guitar player who was known internationally as The Texas Twister.

Singers of Taylor's stature and musicians of Johnny Copeland's calibre have shaped Shemekia's future since she was an infant.

Larger-than-life performers the likes of Taylor and Big Mama Thornton were always on the turntable in Johnny Copeland's house. He was in Thornton's backing band in the '50s. In the '60s, he toured behind Otis Redding. On his own, he mixed jump blues, soul and African traditional blues into such notable albums as *Bringing It All Back Home*, and the Grammy Award-winning *Showdown*, which he made with Robert Cray and his childhood friend, Albert Collins. Johnny Copeland died in 1997, but not before eight heart operations, including a transplant (there's that 'big' motif, again). And not before he schooled his youngest daughter, Shemekia, in how to stage a potent live show.

Copeland had known since 1989 that he had congestive heart failure. But in 1995, medication to temper the problem failed and he was plugged into something called a left ventricular assist device, a state-of-the-art pump that kept his heart beating. Yet he continued touring, through Texas, California, New England, relying on three-hour batteries to keep the pump going for the duration of his sets.

To make sure he didn't test the boundaries of those batteries, 15-year-old Shemekia began working with him, as his opening act. She always liked to sing, but only took it seriously when she realized how ill her father had become.

"My father always used to tell me, 'Nobody wants to hear me sing for an extra buck. You have to do it because otherwise you'd be sick not doing it.' That's what happened to me. I felt sick not doing it."

Watching her father resist his bad health gave her a strong jolt of the blues, she says. But she'd been around some before that, too.

Her voice is husky and a bit sleepy sounding when she answers the phone in her rural Pennsylvania home. She moved here with her mother and boyfriend just a couple of

years ago, eager to leave behind the neighbourhood where she'd grown up: Harlem in New York City. That's where she first got a dose of tough times, the place where several of her teenage friends and a cousin were murdered.

"Some were involved in drugs," she says, remembering the past in short, unexpansive sentences. "It was dangerous. The cops never showed up until somebody was dead. There was always something happening. Our build-

the street, with nothing else to do but get into trouble. If something was happening on the street when I was walking by, I'd rush to get home. I came home and listened to music and read books. We did family things. If we went out, it was with the family."

Johnny Copeland landed in New York in 1975, when gigs for his sizzling southern blues guitar were inexplicably drying up in Texas. He met his second wife, Sandra, a couple of years later and together they had Shemekia and her older brother. But only Shemekia, the youngest of Johnny Copeland's seven children, seemed as captivated as he was by music.

At the age of five or six, she was tagging along with him to the recording studio. At eight, she was watching him play in nightclubs and was coaxed onto the stage of Harlem's Cotton Club to sing a tune one Mother's Day. Her affection for blues and gospel grew out of her father's taste and out of listening to him sitting around the house playing guitar. Her fascination with soul may have been the product of a long car trip.

"We had an old Lincoln, it was big and ugly and green and it had an eight-track player in it. The only eight-track thing we had was one on Sam Cooke. So when we drove down to North Carolina to see my grandmother, it was 500 hundred miles and one Sam Cooke tape. Now, Sam Cooke is one of my favourite artists in the world."

Johnny Copeland's influence still shapes his daughter's future. One of her most moving performances is on *Ghetto Child*, a song her father wrote about Harlem. Her work ethic is entirely derived from the lessons Johnny learned over a long career and the example he showed her while they shared the stage during the last two years of his life.

"When my father was on stage, he gave it 150 per cent for whoever was right there, no matter who was in the audience, if there were 100 people or 15. He used to say, 'If there's only that many, then they're devoted fans.'"

When she decided to make music her life's work, crucial elements of her father's world were on hand to assist.



"I realized I don't have to shake guys' heads in my boobs. I discovered there were classy ladies doing this. Those sassy women who wear low-cut clothes and have foul mouths and all that stuff. I realized it wasn't all about that. I don't have to use profanity on stage. I don't have to wear lowcut clothes unless I want to."

ing was always getting burned down. It was terrible, terrible."

But Copeland also credits that environment for making her the assertive, determined young woman of today.

"I wouldn't have wanted to grow up anywhere else," she says. "I'm strong. There's no place in this world I can't go, no place I can't protect myself. A lot of people come to New York and get robbed and I always say, 'You know, it's only people who come to New York who get robbed. New Yorkers never get robbed. They know how to walk.'"

For all her bravado, Copeland concedes she was never really part of the mean streets. Her parents saw to that.

"I was a troubled girl. I used to call them stoop girls. I wasn't allowed to sit out on

Her manager, John Hahn, was a long-time associate of her father's who has known Copeland since she was eight years old. Hahn's primary career as a writer of advertising jingles is audibly in play on the catchy tunes and neat rhyming couplets he supplies in droves to both her debut album, *Turn the Heat Up*, and last year's follow-up release, *Wicked*. Lines the likes of: "Boys will be boys, I understand, but what I need is a leading man," from the tune *Love Scene* are perfect embodiments of Copeland's sass and strength.

Several of the other songwriters whose work is heavily represented on both CDs come with sterling credentials and also travelled in Johnny Copeland's circles.

Dennis Walker is a veteran L.A.-based producer and songwriter who won Grammys for producing Robert Cray's albums *Strong Persuader* and *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark* and has played with such luminaries as Albert Collins, Otis Rush and Percy Mayfield.

Jon Tiven is a crack writer and guitarist whose past straddles blues, the new wave underground and rock. His songs have been recorded by B.B. King, Wilson Pickett, Rick Derringer and Huey Lewis. Guitarist Jimmy Vivone is a nine-year member of the Max Weinberg Seven, the house band on *Late Night With Conan O'Brien*. He's played with a range of blues and rock musicians including Al Kooper and Chuck Berry.

Together, they deliver material that Copeland can not only sing the heck out of, but can utterly buy into when she does.

The personas she adopts range from the surprised young lady who realizes with horror that she has inadvertently become "the other woman," to a witty and wiser take-care gal

well into her career with men, who on *My Turn Baby* sings with rollicking aplomb, "My turn baby, my turn's about to start / Cause when it was your turn, all you did was break my heart."

Her preference for the decidedly liberated and contemporary sounding lyric is a conscious decision in which she takes pride.

"It took me a while, but I realized I'm doing something totally different," explains Copeland, noting she's been observing female blues singers up close since she was a child, both on TV and on the stages where her father played.

In addition to Taylor and Thornton, the role models she most admired included Ruth Brown (who makes a guest appearance on *Wicked*.)

What made a profound impression on her was the grace these women wove into otherwise rambunctious performances. They were so much different than the typical female blues and R&B singers she saw portrayed on TV in the age of MTV.

"I realized I don't have to shake guys' heads in my boobs. I discovered there were classy ladies doing this. Those sassy women who wear low-cut clothes and have foul mouths and all that stuff. I realized it wasn't all about that. I don't have to use profanity on stage. I don't have to wear lowcut clothes unless I want to."

She also cites her mother for setting a strong example. Sandra Copeland not only raised two upstanding and well-adjusted children in Harlem while Johnny was on the road, she also earned a degree in psychology at the same time.

Now, Copeland believes, it's her turn to

inspire and teach young people a thing or two, even at her own tender age.

She'd be thrilled if she could spark an appreciation for the blues in a new generation of music fans. While it never occurred to her to slight her parents' music and substitute hip hop or pop-rock for blues, she certainly heard avowedly commercial black music every day on the boom boxes of Harlem. But her dedication to roots sounds has created a personal philosophy she articulates thoughtfully.

"I don't think children should listen all the time to Britney Spears and Christine Aguilera. I call it the bopping head syndrome. Us Americans, we just like to bop our heads. Nobody wants to listen to anything that means anything. We just care that it's got a cool beat."

She certainly understands how widespread the taste for disposable pop music is. But she knows it can be tamed. Even as a teenager she was hooking converts.

"I never wanted to listen to it, but it's not like my mom and dad wouldn't let me listen to other stuff, cause you can't do that. It's out there all the time. So I was totally (odd to) my friends. But then they'd come to my house and listen to Koko Taylor and they'd have a fit."

For now, she's doing her part with her young niece, replacing Spears with blues belters whenever she babysits. With her fearless composure and a seemingly endless supply of snappy tunes from savvy writers, it's not out of the question that Copeland herself will excite her niece's generation. Her sleepy tone falls away at the mere suggestion.

"It's very important to get young people listening to this music. It's the best music out there."

Correspondence

Praise from the Paperboy

I just wanted to write and thank you for the article. I think it turned out great and covered a lot more than the usual articles do. I always enjoy features that dig in a bit further and give us some insight as to what or who makes the artist tick. Best of luck with the move to print. I know it will be a lot of hard work. We'll see you down the road.

Tom Landa, Vancouver, B.C.

House Concerts

Either everything old is new again, or that there's yet another area in which I was ahead of my time!

In the fifties, when I was the only folk and jazz producer in Toronto, I used to host house concerts. Josh White (whom I later managed), Pete Seeger, Odetta, Bob Gibson, Theo Bikel, etc., all sang at my house parties

at which money dropped in a hat was passed on to them. These were a little different in intent from the new ones, they were to garner an enthusiastic nucleus audience for later concerts at Eaton Auditorium, Massey Hall, or various Toronto clubs. Word of mouth was the desired effect, and it worked

In turn, the people who managed these artists helped me find dates in the US for some of our Canadian folk singers - Sharon Trostin (now Sharon, Lois and Bram), Bonnie Dobson, Ian and Sylvia. Actually when I took my then boyfriend to hear Ian & Sylvia, he signed them up and did for them something like what he had done for Joan Baez and Bob Dylan.

Vivienne Muhling, Toronto, ON.

Albums wanted in USA

Not only is Canadian songwriting and folk music under-represented in Canada, just

try to purchase Canada's finest music in the United States. If Canadian music puts in an appearance it's two Loreena McKennit albums behind a 'Canada' card. Even shops that desperately want to market Canadian music have enormous trouble obtaining it. I had to take the train to Montreal to obtain La Bottine Souriante albums. Let's not even discuss native American tribal music or lesser-known Francophone performers such as Barachois.

If Canada wishes to be recognised as anything other than a wasteland with a Customs gate at the edge, it has to start acting like a true product and force, not an ethnocentric group keeping its talents to itself!

Alexander D. Mitchell IV, Glen Burnie, MD, USA

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Trainspotting

Seventy-six-year-old Cape Breton fiddler Buddy MacMaster recently released his second album, *The Judique Flyer*, to universal acclaim. Roddy Campbell catches up with this modest virtuoso.

TEENAGE FIDDLERS Vincent and Buddy MacMaster had never clapped eyes on each other before. But to play together for a dance in the one-room school in Troy, Cape Breton, would earn each the princely sum of four dollars. And a fella could buy a new fiddle for that kind of fee in 1938.

"Vincent MacMaster. I'd never met him before and I didn't know how we'd get along, but we got along fine. I knew a lot of the same tunes he did. We played in unison and we had no accompaniment. It was just a little village schoolhouse dance but we had a pretty good crowd. I'll never forget that night," says Buddy MacMaster of his first ever paid performance.

It cost him 30 cents to travel on Sullivan's bus to that gig. But flush with his fee on the return journey, he took the steam train: the Judique Flyer. Thus the title of the now 76-year-old's utterly exquisite current collection of traditional Cape Breton fiddle tunes. The U.K.'s cool, insightful and popular monthly music magazine *Mojo* rated *The Judique Flyer* as one of the 10 best folk albums of last year. As well it might.

MacMaster's subtle grace, hypnotic synopation and exquisite tone propels *The*

Judique Flyer with all the consummate skill of the virtuoso he truly is. This absolutely lovely, lovely uncluttered collection of reels, jigs, hornpipes and slow airs he gathered largely from local sources.

"I'm not a composer. I had never any interest in composing. I don't know why. But I guess there's lots of great tunes that are not played much. They're a lot better than what I'd produce. I was always working through the years and was more interested in learning from the books. So I just went through some and picked out different tunes. Of course, I had heard most of them played before. But they're not played so much; they're older tunes."

On each of the 14 tracks he is backed by a different piano player. They include his daughter Mary and youngest sister Betty. The idea came from Nova Scotia record label owner Stephen MacDonald. While MacMaster initially thought it a good idea, the cost concerned him. MacDonald, fortunately, convinced him otherwise.

"He didn't think it would cost much more than to hire one piano player and maybe it would be a good sales gimmick and give each cut a little different sound.

"We didn't rehearse. Some of the players I had never played with before: Mac Morin

and the French guy [Joel Chasson]. But they're familiar with the Cape Breton playing; they didn't have any problems."

The first known recording of Buddy MacMaster was taped during a visit to Detroit back in 1949. It took another 40 years, however, before he recorded his first album. Unbelievably, *The Judique Flyer* is only his second.

"I didn't do much until I was up in years. I was approached many times but I never did record until 1989 and that was my first. I did two sets then. I never thought I was much good at it. Maybe I'm not the best. I never dared to record.

Hugh Allan "Buddy" MacMaster was born October 18, 1924, in the northern Ontario mining town of Timmins. His mother spoke Gaelic fluently and he remembers her humming, lilting, jiggling tunes — mouth music. But the MacMasters left Timmins for a farm near Judique when Buddy turned four.

"I was very interested in the pipes when I was a boy. I was interested in any kind of music. But I remember when I was a toddler they would have annual picnics in our community in Judique, here. And they'd bring in a piper from Inverness, Cape Breton, and I'd follow him all around all after noon while he

was piping.

"I was 11 when I first picked up the violin. But I can remember when I was four, or a little younger, pretending to be playing the violin with two little sticks. I wanted to play then."

The most commonly used fiddle at the time was the German-made Steiner, pronounced Stainer by the locals. They could be ordered from the Eaton's catalogue for slightly less than four dollars. A really good fiddle ran around \$25. Mostly men played. And in the horse and buggy days, before radio and recordings, the districts that Cape Breton fiddlers came from could be identified by the accents of in their playing.

"Each player plays somewhat different, with different feelings. Your touch and coordination is a bit like handwriting, I suppose. It's pretty hard to explain that but personal feeling – your makeup – seems to come out in your music."

Judique fiddler Alexander MacDonnell was a particular influence on the young MacMaster. MacDonnell played by ear but later learned to read music, as would his apprentice.

"A lot of fiddlers who would be travelling around would come to Judique and stay at his home. And you used to hear quite a bit of pretty good music, you know, musicians who could read the music. He would learn the tunes from them. And I picked up some of the tunes from him. He used to stress, you know, to try and play the tunes as correctly as possible. I learned to read. I never took any lessons, but I did get an instruction book when I was 23 and learned to read from that."

Buddy MacMaster began work as a telegrapher and station agent for the Canadian National Railway in 1943. While he held various positions before retiring in 1988, he pro-

vided the fiddle music for local dances on many a weekend. This traditional dance music originated in Scotland but evolved differently on Cape Breton. This contrast separates local fiddlers from elsewhere.

"The dancing we do in Cape Breton has a lot to do with how the music is played. In Scotland it is tempos for Scottish country dancing and Highland dancing. There is very little Scottish country dancing done here. There's step dancing that was brought here from Scotland and handed down through generations, as well as the music.

"They kind of lost that in Scotland. I've been over to Scotland, to the Island of Skye, to the Gaelic college there. This summer coming will be the eighth at that particular school. And usually a step dancer goes over with me to teach. They really enjoy the step dancing at the school.

"And that will affect the music – playing for step-dancing. In Cape Breton, they dance square sets, lancers, and of course, our music is sort of tempered for that. The fiddling is a little more like Irish in some respects and in another closer to the Scottish way, as far as the notes and the tunes."

Despite its vibrant strength today, interest in Cape Breton fiddle music was dying out in the late sixties. Inspired by the Lloyd McGuinness documentary, *The Vanishing Fiddler*, The Cape Breton Fiddlers' Association was formed.

A key aspect of its mandate was to hold an annual festival that invited all fiddlers to participate, regardless of age or talent. They did have to rehearse, though, and that got the ball rolling.

And while Buddy MacMaster now frequently hosts workshops on the west coasts of America and Scotland, he never taught formally around Judique. With typical modesty, he says he didn't feel qualified.

Ashley MacIsaac pays tribute to mentor

The fiddle revival in Cape Breton in recent years has produced several remarkable local players. Ashley MacIsaac and Natalie MacMaster, Buddy's niece, are probably the best known. In an interview I did with MacIsaac for the U.K.'s *Folk Roots* magazine in 1996, he had this to say about his mentor:

"The first time I step danced in public was to Buddy MacMaster. It was a 50th wedding anniversary at a place called Glencoe Station. I went up on stage and I went for 30 seconds and I ran down to my dad and I said, 'Dad that tune's no good.'

"Buddy had his eyes closed and was still playing and I tapped him on the shoulder and I said, 'Buddy, that tune's no good; play *King George*.' And he sort of smiled and laughed and he played *King George* and I started dancing.

"After that I always took him as the man. I got this one tape – I was 12 years old – of Buddy and John Morris Rankin (of the Rankin Family) at Glencoe Mills. I took from that tape all my lessons to play the fiddle and the piano. I listened to it constantly.

When I first went out and played for a step dance, I basically went out and did a Buddy MacMaster cover show – played the tunes the way he did and basically learned from him.

"I thought he was the best. That clean sound, and it was driving, and it was rhythmic, and very stately, you know, the way he would play. I always liked that. It looked like he was the king."

Still is, Ashley, still is.

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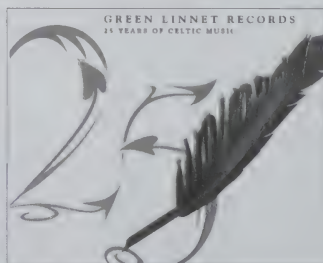
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Recordings

Afro Celt Sound System

Volume 3: Further In Time

Real World Records
CDRW96

The good book on the Afro Celts goes something along the lines of "utterly brilliant live but a bit erratic on record." And let's face it, *Volume 1: Sound And Magic* couldn't possibly live up to the advance hype. *Volume 2: Release* certainly had its moments of inspired genius but never quite achieved that rare status that separates the excellent from the indispensable. Besides, when did a Grammy nomination ever guarantee the goods?

Okay, hairs have been split, so to *Volume 3: Further In Time*. A whole different kettle of custard altogether, this.

For starters, Peter Gabriel and Robert Plant make guest vocal appearances as do the equally wonderful Pina Kollars and Julie Murphy, the latter singing in Welsh. Still, advance prospects looked ominous with the opening *North Part 1* and its sullen keyboard wash over Larla O'Lionaird-led chants.

Hah! Just the calm before the storm, dear reader, just the calm before the storm. Step by intuitive step, the Afro Celts explode into a mental mix of pipes, whistles, thumping trip hop beats, samples and probably the kitchen sink on undeniably affecting rhythms set somewhere between Ireland and Iran.

And really, there's no letting up. The Gabriel-led *When You're Falling* would become a monster hit in an ideal world. The lovely, lovely *Go On Through* deserves a similar fate.

Plant's stellar contribution, beautifully assisted by Murphy, on *Life Begin Again* is not a million miles from the North African setting of his take on *Gallows Pole*. But if *Persistence Of Memory* is a tad on the sickly sweet, sentimental side, it's quickly forgotten as the Afro Celts again flex their collective muscles on the widely infectious *Silken Whip*.

Reviewing without sleeve notes — this is an advance copy — is a bit of a bugger because there's really so much going on as they flit from one seamless, gobsmacking flight of fantasy to the next using the full range of their mighty arsenal. Truly, this is a record of infinite creativity, utterly impossible to ignore.

— By Roddy Campbell



Baaba Maal

The Holmes Brothers

Speaking In Tongues

Alligator/Stony Plain Records
ALCD 4877

Say you haven't been to church in years, but you'd like to send kudos to a higher power while staying off organized religion's mailing list. Hey pilgrim, meet The Holmes Brothers. The trio of Sherman and Wendell Holmes and their friend Popsy Dixon shower thanks on the Big Guy in a stirring set of borrowed and original tunes that respect the faith, but dodge the dogma.

Crack sixty-something musicians, they were schooled in gospel, blues and C&W in their home state of Virginia and added more smarts playing New York City's R&B and Top 40 bands during the '60s and '70s. For the past 20 years, they've cooked these ingredients into a delicious stew of soul, funk and urban blues, released on five previous discs. All that experience pays off here in a mastery of style and song selection.

Introspective compositions by Ben Harper (*I Shall Not Walk Alone*, *I Want to Be Ready*) sit comfortably between such subversive spirituals as Bob Dylan's *Man of Peace*

and the O'Jays classic *Love Train*, with its daring, glacially slow arrangement. Less agreeable is the hokey, quasi-bluegrass of *Jesus Got His Hooks In Me*.

Producer Joan Osborne sometimes gets carried away lavishing the disc with torrid female backing vocals from *The Precious Three* (featuring Osborne plus singers Catherine Russell and Maydie Miles). But given The Holmes' tremendous depth as original songwriters, the distinctive lead vocals each one contributes, and their preference for playing sparse, meaningful solos, that's a transgression easily waved away at the confessional.

— By Helen Metella

Baaba Maal

Mi Yeewnii/Missing You

Palm Pictures
Palm P2A 2067

My, my, my, what have we here?

Radiohead and Stone Roses producer John Lockie overseeing a Baaba Maal recording? And the mighty Mansour Seck back in the fold for the first time since 1989's acoustic colossus, *Djam Leeli*?

Something surely gives.

Indeed, indeed. After the largely disappointing mish-mash of *Nomad Soul*, Maal gets back to the basics with *Mi Yeewnii*. Recorded live after dark in the open air in the small village of Mbunk, Senegal, it opens with the beautiful, gentle kora led, *Yoolette Maman*, complete with cocks crowing and children playing in the background. It's a breathtaking harbinger of what's to come.

While not as raw or as spartan as *Djam Leeli*, *Mi Yeewnii*, nevertheless, is for all intents and purposes an acoustic album and something quite special altogether. Possibly it's the familiarity of his surroundings, whatever, there's a gracious serenity that runs through this disc.

Assured, relaxed and content to frequently sit back in the mix, Maal, for the most part, wraps his warm, glorious singing in an intoxicating fermentation of massed voices, kora strings, bafalon beats, and industrial strength percussion.

Of course, there's also no denying Mansour Seck's indelible acoustic guitar putting its stamp on everything from the nursery rhyme rhythm of *Miyaabele* to the expansive

Senegalese Ngumme.

While the more discerning may point fingers at the Spanish-Cuban influences of *Kowoni Maayo* as a cultural oddity, it really is a minor blemish. Casually brilliant from start to finish, *Mi Yeewonii* is surely odds-on favourite for album of the year

— By Roddy Campbell

Maria Muldaur

Richland Woman Blues

Stony Plain Records
SPCD-1270

Adorable long-time roots singer Maria Muldaur has tapped into a blues repertoire from the 1920s and '30s with *Richland Woman Blues*. Teaming up with half a dozen friends — among them Taj Mahal, Alvin Youngblood Hart, former jug band cohort John Sebastian, and Amos Garrett, collaborator and guitar light on her big hit, *Midnight at the Oasis* — Muldaur creates a fine tribute to several early pioneers. Fourteen songs, duets for the most part, are pared down to the raw, earthy essence. And there's power in simplicity. Always an easy voice, Muldaur shows that she knows her blues from sassy to lowdown, and if there's such a thing as a mellow rasp, she's got it. Standout cuts include: a hair-raising version of Mississippi Fred McDowell's *It's a Blessing* with "blues sister" Bonnie Raitt on vocals and slide guitar; a formidable rendering of Blind Willie Johnson's *Soul of a Man* with Taj Mahal and Roy Rogers on guitar and slide; and the saucy, amiable *Me and My Chauffeur Blues* penned by legendary blueswoman Memphis Minnie, who inspired this worthy tribute disc.

— By Mairi MacLean

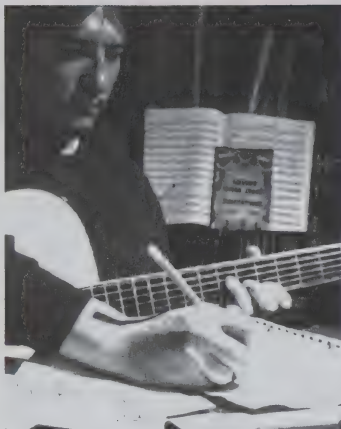
Eliza Carthy

Angels & Cigarettes

Warner Bros
CDW 47698

Those of you who bought Eliza's previous CD — the double *Red Rice* — will be surprised by her latest offering. Whereas *Red Rice* comprised mostly traditional English songs and tunes, this new one consists almost entirely of original compositions — plus Paul Weller's *Wildwood* — in a style that leans much further towards pop than folk.

Nevertheless, there is some lovely singing and fiddle playing, and tasteful contributions from guests like veteran player B.J. Cole on pedal steel, Van Dyke Parks on piano, and Leland Sklar on bass. The first five tracks are quite upbeat and really showcase her gorgeous vocals and exemplary musicianship. Carthy certainly has a gift for writing memorable tunes and she plays some scorchingly beautiful fiddle riffs in tracks like the opening *Whispers*



Tim Readman

of *Summer* and the single *Train Song*. Dance hall rhythms abound on *Beautiful Girl* and her esteemed father, Martin Carthy, gets to strut his stuff on *The Company Of Men* and *Whole*.

Breathe is an interesting account of her childhood problems with asthma and *Poor Pitiful Me* isn't the self-indulgent rant you might expect from such a title. Like most of its counterparts on this album, it's quite boppy. For me, though, *The Company Of Men* gets a bit syrupy courtesy of Van Dyke Parks' lush strings. And it's the one that seems to get the most media attention, for its opening line: "I've given blow jobs on couches to men who don't love me any more." Why? I find myself asking, and the song doesn't really provide the answers — even though it might generate a few column inches, so to speak!

All in all, a very impressive songwriting debut with musical arrangements that fit nicely alongside the electric half of *Red Rice* and bode well for the future of both folk music and intelligently written pop.

— By Steve Edge

Tim Readman

Into The Red

Big City Productions
BC 014

For his first solo foray, Tim Readman, former front man with Vancouver's *Fear of Drinking*, has taken a simple route back to his days in northern English folk clubs. No band, just his voice and guitar and a wee bit of tasteful support from some of British Columbia's finer traditional players: Geoffrey Kelly of the Paperboys and Spirit of the West on flute and whistle, and Amy Stephen from Mad Pudding on accordion, piano and harp.

Into the Red is a collection of original songs that show that master Readman has something going on in the songwriting department. His subject matter runs the gamut from

sad truths about love, to the political, to the historical. He takes us on a tour of a museum in *Dave's World* and then on vacation with his granny in *Whitely Bay Holidays*. On *Oh Canada*, Readman wears his patriotic heart on his sleeve that undoubtedly has "Canada Kicks Ass" emblazoned across the chest. No ungrateful immigrant here.

From the traditional sounding *\$1,000 Ring* to the political *On the Brink*, Readman delivers the vocal goods in his northeast English accent, bringing us to the traditional role of the folk singer: tellin' ya about his current take on the world.

Into the Red is a great step forward in the promising solo career of Tim Readman. But then again, what would you expect from a man who stuck the Bee Gees' *Stayin' Alive* into the middle of the traditional *Ye Jacobites By Name* and survived.

— By Les Siemieniuk

Lester Quitzau

So Here We Are

LQ Productions
LQ 005

All but two tracks on this basically self-produced album are originals. And the two exceptions, *Rollin' and Tumblin'* and *Honey Bee*, by Muddy Waters, really kick this disc into high gear right off the bat. Edmonton-based guitar-slinger Quitzau — a member of the casual trio, Juno Award-winning Tri-Continental — clearly loves to play blues, and whether he's on acoustic, electric or slide, when he finds the groove, the music rocks.

You can almost feel the blood pumping when Quitzau, a fine guitar player, ably backed by multi-instrumentalist Greg Johnson and Lyle Mozlan, locks into the rhythm. It's when he follows an admirable but daunting ambition to go beyond blues, by taking on sensitive folk songs or by painting sonic landscapes in feedback or whatever, that the songs seem to lack the same emotion. It's not by any means that they are bad, it's just that they're not as powerful as his straight-ahead boogie and you might find yourself longing for more of the stuff he plays to get people on their feet.

— By Jeff Holubitsky

Gjallahorn

Sjofn

NorthSide
(NSD 6052)

The *gjallahorn* was the ringing horn used to summon dead heroes from Valhalla at the end of the world (*ragnarök*). It was said that the horn could be heard across nine worlds. Well, Gjallahorn, a Finnish quartet, live up to all that their name evokes on this, their second album.

While the sound of Scandinavian folk

music is something that most of us are a lot more familiar with than we might have been a few years ago. Gjallahorn distinguish themselves with some unique vocal and instrumental twists. On the instrumental side, they include a whole host of esoteric percussion textures and on several tracks didgeridoo provides a fearsome drone.

On the vocal side Jenny Wilhems' voice is distinct and idiosyncratic with her occasional classical Indian inflections and improvisations. While the group frequently conjures thick waves of sound, they can play it quietly, too, as with the medieval sounding *Minuet* from *Jeppo-Polska* and *Sinivatsa* (*Dolphin Calling*) which is slightly less New Age and slightly more wonderfully magical than you might expect. Overall, a rather substantial and challenging sophomore effort and another worthy and unique addition to the shelf of NorthSide releases.

— By Richard Thornley

Old 97's Satellite Rides

Elektra
CD62513

How do you criticize a band for some of the same qualities you deeply admired in their earlier efforts? Reluctantly, because Old 97's is an engaging act and the fifth album from the Dallas-bred quartet is another skilful confection of candied twang and British-invasion-era merriment.

The band locks on to quickie, highly hummable melodies. Rhett Miller's shape-changing vocals — alternately sultry, nasal or snarky — are thrust forward in the mix for easy singalongs. There's energy to burn and enough electric guitar to keep all that frivolity from blowing away. And sometimes, there's a phrase enterprising enough to warm the heart of a Buddy Holly fan.

"In the way the phone goes dead, in the way you lose your head, I can see how this thing is going to end," from *Nervous Guy* for instance. On paper, it sounds like a fitting follow up to 1999's corner-to-corner party-smart record, *Fight Songs*.

But in practice these gummy tunes, with pleasing tips of the hat to everyone from Willie Nelson to Ray Davies, are but lightweight teasers. It beats me how you can open and punctuate a song with the provocative line "Do you wanna mess around," and devolve into something inconsequential about a shopping complex being torn down (*Buick City Complex*). The loping melancholy of *Up the Devil's Pay* just can't make up for lyrics that aren't all that clever, or such trite stuff next door as, "I believe in love but it don't believe in me," from the otherwise catchy romp *Rollerskate Skinny*.

As spring-into-summer discs go, *Satellite*

Rides isn't the least consequential thing you'll hear. Just don't let it be the first Old 97's recording to ever cross your ears, because there's a danger it'll also be your last.

— By Helen Metella

Mary Jane Lamond Gaelic Songs of Cape Breton

Turtlemusik
02 50889

No trip hop beats this time around for Mary Jane Lamond. No rock 'n' roll paraphernalia. No studio jiggery pokery. Actually, there's no trace of contemporary influences whatsoever, unless you include the occasional use of a piano. Recorded in the former United Church in North River with various noted Gaelic singers from around the island, accompaniments are sparse with just the odd teasing taste of fiddle, pipes, acoustic guitar and, of course, piano for ornamentation.

The focus, then, is clearly on the vocal performances of Lamond and her guests. Sometimes singing solo a cappella or leading a rousing spirited chorus, she strips these *Gaelic Songs of Cape Breton* to their tender, moving, mournful, joyful essence. And while the lack of English translations of these ancient verses seems a lax oversight, it's only a minor hiccup. Stirring and refreshingly raw, this disc is clearly a labour of love and made for all the right reasons. The tradition of the Cape Breton Gaels, it appears, is in safe, compassionate hands.

— By Roddy Campbell

Robb Johnson 21st Century Blues

Irregular Records
IRR043

On his latest release — *21st Century Blues* — Robb Johnson's world is still unfair to the underdog, the corporations are still greedy and blind, and politics is still a full-contact sport. Yet he manages to rise above mere political songwriting and enter the mesmerizing world of entertainment.

His voice shows traces of Leon Rosselson, Roy Bailey, Andy White and Jacques Brel. Johnson has chosen the perfect backdrop for his voice and guitar, with the addition of a string quartet back-up delivered superbly by Saskia Tomkins and Miranda Sykes.

From musing on the death penalty, *Texas Prison Songs*, to those days when nothing seems to go right, *Everybody Wants To Break Your Heart*, to the things *Father Christmas* hears on the Hounslow High Street, Johnson delivers superb original songs. For me, though, the standout in this album is his version of *Voir Un Ami Pleurer* (*To See a Friend Crying*)

written by Jacques Brel. Not only is Robb Johnson a terrific writer and singer of his own songs, he is also master interpreter. *21st Century Blues* is a wonderful collection of insightful, moving songs written for the heart and mind?

— By Les Siemieniuk



Taj Mahal

Taj Mahal & The Hula Blues Band

Hanapepe Dream
Tradition & Moderne
T&M 017

Taj Mahal just keeps 'em coming.

Hanapepe Dream successfully mixes the honesty of the blues with the folksy island sound of Hawaii and proves again that if the music is good, it can transcend all stereotypes. Ask anyone to hum a Hawaiian tune and you'll probably get something from a Looneytoon. But not here. In songs that range from the blue-as-blues-gets *Stagger Lee*, to the normally hokey *Moonlight Lady*, to Dylan's *All Along the Watchtower*, the Hawaiian-influenced arrangements remain as delightful as a cool Mai Tai at the old Royal Hawaiian Hotel. His voice hasn't lost anything over the years, the band is great, and everybody plays like they want to be there. What more could you ask?

— By Jeff Holubitsky

Old Blind Dogs FIT?

Green Linnet
GLCD 1214

Eagerly awaited, this new Old Blind Dogs disc is just the thing to sweep you headlong into the festival season. While their previous release, *The World's Room*, was a strong disc, it was very much the output of a band in transition. On *FIT?* the whole thing gels just that little bit more. With an even mix of tunes and songs, featuring once again Jim Malcom's

rich, strong vocals, the pace has picked up. Rory Campbell's pipes are a little more evident, Paul Jennings' percussion is deftly interwoven throughout both tunes and songs, and the Old Dogs stretch their sound a bit further, by including an a cappella *Tatties And Herrin'*, adding a banjo on *Awa' Whigs Awa'*, and creating a Caribbean groove on *Kincardine Lads*. At its heart though, *FIT?* is a collection of (mostly) traditional Scottish tunes and songs, albeit a collection that dares you to just try sitting still while listening. A serious contender for best record of the year.

— Sandy Stiff and Richard Thornley

The Pogues

The Very Best Of. . .

WEA

8573 87459 2

The Pogues changed everything.

Folk wallowed in a mire of derisory clichés until they staggered out of Camden Town with punk's manic energy and spirit of open-mindedness and "aimed a hefty boot at the crotch of convention," as English journalist Colin Irwin colorfully noted at the time. Subsequently, folk was reborn as roots and has never really looked back.

As it turned out, The Pogues had in Shane Patrick Lysaght MacGowan a songwriter the equal of a Ray Davies, or a Ewan MacColl, for that matter, and a flair for callously brilliant arrangements that sprawled across a battle-scarred terrain that stretched from Louisiana to Macedonia. They had hits, were courted by the likes of Jack Nicholson and Bruce Springsteen, and inspired a million dubious parodies. MacGowan's ferocious appetite for drink and drugs, however, sent them spiralling into oblivion. The rest of the band fired him in 1991 and struggled along before calling it a day five years later.

The Best Of The Pogues is, by and large, a fairly representative legacy, subject to the usual failings where personal tastes dictate such matters. For the most part, all the big songs are here: *Fairy Tale Of New York*, *A Pair Of Brown Eyes*, *The Old Main Drag*, *The Sick Bed Of Cuchulain*, *Rain Street*, *White City*, *Sunnyside Of The Street* and the UK hit with the Dubliners, *The Irish Rover*.

There are, as usual, several dreadful omissions. Phil Chevron's masterful epic about Irish emigration, *Thousands Are Sailing*, and MacGowan's raw, unsentimental *London You're a Lady* being the most obvious. And it's easy enough to grumble about the inclusion of *Fiesta* over *The Turkish Song Of The Damned* or *Night Train To Lorca*. But at the end of the day, this collection remains a considerable accomplishment and one likely to flourish through the folk tradition. When will we hear their likes again?

— By Roddy Campbell

Sorten Muld

III

NorthSide
NSD605

Scandinavia's aural marauders just keep coming. Sorten Muld, an extended trio from Denmark, adds contemporary dance beats to traditional songs and ballads, and mixes folk and electronic instrumentation. The result is a Molotov cocktail that defies generic categorization.

III opens with sounds of bagpipe and hurdy gurdy drones that break into a tune deceptively similar to the nursery rhyme *Pussycat, pussycat, where have you been?* False scent. A moment later, bass, drums, electric guitar and keyboards crash in, subsiding at last for Sorten Muld's powerful vocalist Ulla Bendixen to launch into the traditional *Roselil Rose* in which the heroine's father asks her: "Whom have you embraced during the night?/Around your breast the dress is so tight/Through it I can see your milk flowing." That sets the tone for the whole album. Among the many delights of *III* are the mystical *Vølven* (*The Fortune Teller*), based on an ancient Eddic poem and sung to a thumping beat; the magnificently eerie *Ulver*, a variant of the popular child ballad of *Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight*; *Tor of Hafsgaard*, a gripping tale of sexual revenge and feuding; and the gorgeous love lyric *Dagmar*.

All ten tracks are played with great skill, and arranged with daring by Bendixen and her colleagues Henrik Munch and Martin Ottosen. My sole complaint about this brilliant album is that in the sleeve notes the lyrics, which have been well translated, are unaccountably not presented in full. You'll have to learn Danish to find out what happened to Ramund after he followed the dwarf daughter — who "carved the runes so well/That the birds forgot how to sing" — into the grove of wild roses.

— By Tony Montague



Andy White

Andy White

andy white

True North Records
PTN 85

It is sad when you have to give a record a less than glowing review, particularly one from an artist of this caliber. Once upon a time, Andy White was a celebrated Irish tunesmith, spinning elaborate poems over a Dylanesque web of folk guitar and pop hooks. As of late, he seems to have lost mostly everything but the pop, trimmed down the verbiage, and, well, the point of it just kind of escapes me. Lots of syrupy pop synths, mid-tempo rawk drumming and guitar solos, painfully obvious lyrics (e.g., "look at me, can't you see, I love you, like you love me" on *Come With Me*), very radio-ready and well produced (perhaps over-produced). Mr. White has lost his way and it pains me to say that you should really steer clear of this one.

— By Richard Thornley

Kasey Chambers

The Captain

Asylum/Warner Bros.
CDW 47823

For a 25-year-old, Kasey Chambers has a long history in Australian music. From an early age, she fronted Dead Ringer — a band that included her mother, father and brother. They put out a series of records that won all sorts of Australian country music awards before Chambers turned solo. Last year, she became a bit of a phenomenon Down Under, winning female artist of the year at their equivalent of the Junos, beating out the likes of Kylie Minogue.

Although Chambers' singing conjures up comparisons to Emmylou Harris and Gillian Welch, in the end it is unique, new and yet familiar. Her performance on this album is superbly delivered and covers all the emotional bases — at times vulnerable, at times charming, sometimes defiant, and sometimes, well, the only appropriate word is sassy.

She keeps the family connection as her brother Nash produced the album and her father plays on it. The production is traditional roots-country, folk rock with guitar, bass and drums with a few fiddle and dobro fills thrown in here and there. And also a couple of ballads with just acoustic guitar. Buddy and Julie Miller from Nashville make guest appearances, so Chambers is attracting quality people to help deliver her music. If this is a country record, its quality is along the lines of Lucinda Williams and Emmylou Harris, both of whom Chambers cites as influences.

And speaking of influences, there's bit of a Canadian connection here. Last year she

released a single in Australia from this album and she put two Fred Eaglesmith songs on it. And that's a good comparison for me. She's like Eaglesmith in that she's travelling her own new country road while still being a product of the past.

The Captain is definitely a keeper. I haven't heard as good a debut in a long, long time. Right from her first note she hooked me and kept me right till the end. There's not a bad note on this whole album. I think we're going hear a lot from Miss Chambers. I can't wait to hear what she comes out with next.

— By Les Siemieniuk

Billy Ross

Shore Street

Greentrax Recordings
CDTRAX 198

It's difficult to describe how truly beautiful is this latest record from singer Billy Ross, a former member of Ossian. On the surface, *Shore Street* is just another well-played collection of traditional songs from that country north of England. However, from the cover art to the song selection, this one has all the signs of being a real labour of love. There is not a note out of place, a song that should not have been part of this collection, or a player who is anything less than the perfect choice to support Ross's singing and guitar-playing.

The album opens with a rousing *Hieland Sodger* which is paired with a tune from Canadian piper, Michael Grey (*Beverley's Wedding*). The moods of the rest of the album range from the sublime a cappella *Fiollaigeann*, to the fiery *Adam Cameron*, with more than a few moments of the mournful along the way, *Matty Groves*. One particular highlight is *Mill o' Tiffy's Annie*, recently heard in a very different version by the Old Blind Dogs, and here performed to absolute perfection by Ross, Tony McManus (guitar), John Martin (fiddle), and William Jackson (harmonium). Highly recommended for fans of traditional song.

— By Richard Thornley

Kevin Crawford

In Good Company

Green Linnet Records
GLCD 1211

Kevin Crawford is the former flutist of the much-applauded Irish ceilidh band, Moving Cloud, and he's currently a member of the similarly exalted Lúnasa. In addition to appearing on three albums with those groups, he recorded a solo flute album in 1994 and has also guested on numerous other artists' outings. On this album he presents the sum of these experiences through pairings with some of Ireland's best fiddlers and accompanists.

With *In Good Company* he has tried to



Blur? Nah, Zubot & Dawson

"peel back the layers of today's musical technology to reach a core sound, particularly the pure drop of fiddle and flute embraced in the sheer joy of playing."

The disc is a collection of sublime slow airs and lively jigs and reels, played by Crawford on D-concert, E-flat, and B-flat flutes, with Tommy Peoples, Frankie Gavin, Tony Linnane, Conor Tully, James Cullinan, Mick Conneely, Sean Smyth, and Manus McGuire taking turns on fiddle. Each duo is masterfully supported by combinations of other players including Martin Hayes (on viola), Carl Hession (piano), Arty McGlynn (guitar), Jim Higgins (bodhran), and Mick Conneely (bouzouki).

The end result is a sound that is leaner and more traditional than that of Lúnasa, perhaps closer in spirit to Moving Cloud. However, it is less of the ceilidh band tradition and, as a result, eminently more enjoyable over the course of a full disc. Overall, this is a very spirited flute and fiddle album, and one that is well worth picking up.

— By Richard Thornley and Sandy Stiff

macAlias

highwired

Greentrax
CDTRAX 199

Country music from Edinburgh with some Robbie Burns and, oh yeah, stunning vocal harmonies thrown in for good measure. Together since 1999 and taking their name from a Hamish Henderson essay, *Alias MacAlias*, macAlias are Karine Polwart (vocalist for the young Scots band Malinky, as well as being the new kid in the Battlefield Band) and Gill Bowman (a noted Robbie Burns interpreter). Listening to the opening track, *All the Way Back Home*, two things strike you immediately: the pure joy created, and the lap steel guitar!

Greentrax is a label with a fine roster of musicians who stretch the boundaries of Scottish roots music, and macAlias are no exception. Half the songs on *highwired* are

their own, featuring the nothing short of brilliant Polwart's John C. Clarke about a gas installer. You have to trust me on this one!

Bowman's own take on one of Robbie Burns' many love affairs, *Gin I Were a Blackbird*, features harpsichord-esque keyboards, rounded out on the rest of the disc by various talented multi-instrumentalists. Having said that, the best reason to listen to *highwired* is the singing. Polwart and Bowman meld their voices equally well on upbeat country ballads and traditional Scots songs, and if you find yourself grinning when listening to *highwired*, don't be surprised. Recommended.

— By Sandy Stiff

Zubot and Dawson

Tractor Parts: Further Adventures in Strang

Black Hen Music
BHCD 0003

As anyone who has seen Zubot and Dawson playing live will tell you, the acoustic timbres they wrench from guitars, violins, mandolins, dobros and even the occasional tuba, are truly captivating.

And with their second album, Jesse Zubot and Steve Dawson have captured their signature sound perfectly.

The music washes over the listener in wave after wave, fast and slow, with hints of blues, bluegrass, folk, and a heavy dose of jazz. But unlike smoky, nightclub jazz acts, this Vancouver-based duo, who toiled in the rock circuit for years before striking out on their own in 1998, isn't stuck on an arch-top with the treble turned low. They aren't afraid to let the strings ring and aren't above adding a judicious touch of wah-wah or delay. The ambitious pair also wrote — either together, separately or with help — the 12 tunes on the disc. These young players prove again that acoustic doesn't have to be traditional to be powerful.

[This one's been around for a while, I know, but it only arrived recently . . . The Ed]

— By Jeff Holubitsky

Michael Kaeshammer

No Strings Attached

Alma
ACD 1020

The lush orchestral arrangement that opens this third album by the amazing Michael Kaeshammer is only its first surprise. Soon the strings disappear altogether and some of the most powerful piano playing heard in years takes over. Kaeshammer at only 23, continually displays the poise and taste of the best players: confident, sensitive, yet never afraid to take a chance. This exciting musician can shift on a dime between soft jazz, ragtime, pop,

Monk, New Orleans swing, and foot-stomping boogie woogie. How good is he? Well, if he played guitar, you'd compare him to the late Danny Gatton, easy.

And did I mention, he is a hell of a singer as well, with a voice somewhere in Dr. John territory. If this is the first time you've ever heard of this young man who moved to Canada from Germany when he was in his teens, it won't be your last. Germany's loss is Canada's gain. Big time.

— By Jeff Holubitsky

Hedningarna

Hedningarna

NorthSide
NSD6057

Hedningarna released their first album back in 1989 and have finally gotten around to releasing it in North America. All good things come to those who wait.

While this release lacks the vocalists, electronics and mutant velocity of the band's later releases, for fans of the Swedish group this is a must-have. All of the elements are there: the mix of original and traditional tunes, the solid percussive foundation, and the top-notch performance and arrangements.

And most of the pieces bear witness to the heavier sound that the group developed on later albums: check out the way the frame drum comes in on *Fulinghalling/scamphalling* and the wonderfully evocative emptiness of *Bjornlaten*.

Great stuff and at a budget price, too.

— By Richard Thornley

R.L. Burnside

Well ... Well ... Well ...

M.C. Records
MC 0042

This collection of 18 songs, unceremoniously recorded between 1980 and 1994 at live performances, in living rooms or even alone with a cheap electric guitar and a boom box, show the power of the blues in the hands of a master.

And make no mistake, R.L. Burnside is the real deal. A storyteller first and foremost, he guides you down the Mississippi with his driving natural beat, never forced, never fake. Sometimes the language is a bit — well, plenty — earthy as in *Staggolee*. Raw sure, but not vulgar. Sometimes the songs are familiar as in *How Many More Years*, by Howlin' Wolf, or *Can't Be Satisfied* by Muddy Waters.

But Burnside's honest, gruff delivery makes them fresh. Like John Lee Hooker before him, R.L. Burnside lets you know that at its core, blues isn't about wailing guitar solos and frantic harmonica epics (though they have their places). It's about some guy (or

woman) telling a story from the heart, and when it's well done, the music is about as good as it gets.

— By Jeff Holubitsky

Ellen McIlwaine

Spontaneous Combustion

Tradition & Moderne
T&M 018

You get the feeling, listening to Ellen McIlwaine's latest CD that this is a woman who has put on many a rocking club show since the days, as her resume states, that she chummed around with Jimi Hendrix.

She knows how to belt out a tune and her nimble work on the slide guitar likely leaves audiences begging for more. A live crowd, however, is somewhat captive and forgiving. At home, if you get tired of an artist, you only have to push a button and the likes of Etta James, Buddy Guy or B.B. King are in your family room.

On this album, you start thinking like that right away with the opening cut *Mockingbird*. (Didn't James Taylor and what's her name do this? I wonder what they're up to?) McIlwaine solicits Taj Mahal for the other half of this duet and guess what? With his superior pipes, you begin wondering what Taj is up to. Same goes for some of her originals. The Indian-inspired *Sidu* is all right, but hasn't somebody else (Jimmy Page) taken the blues down this path before?

This said, McIlwaine does do some interesting playing and singing on this CD, which should make its way into regular play on public radio blues shows. But the thought never leaves: like many a journeyman club act, she's likely far more powerful on stage than disc.

— By Jeff Holubitsky

John Wright Band

Language of the Heart

Greentrax
CDtrax 201

Dave Van Ronk once said the world needs fewer songwriters and more interpreters. Luckily John Wright took his advice. The Scottish-based John Wright Band are a European touring entity yet to venture forth in North America. They have, however, certainly discovered North American songwriters.

Language of the Heart features two each from John Gorka, Richard Shindell, and David Wilcox, as well as one from Lucy Kaplansky and Canadian Tim Harrison.

Most contemporary folk singer/songwriters feel a sense of failure if they include cover tunes on their albums. The notion of "filler" still permeates. So it is a refreshing change to hear someone in the folk idiom content to interpret the work of others.



Ellen McIlwaine

The band sounds extremely full for a trio, with Wright's lovely voice providing the album's central point. And credit where it's due, there are no duff tracks on this album — a very satisfying and compelling release.

— By Les Siemieniuk

Ken Whitely

Listening

Borealis
BCD127

"File Under: Folk/Blues," it says on the sleeve. Then warns: "It also contains gospel, jazz, world and other roots music, contains no artificial preservatives, or synthesized instruments." True. And it's all done with some fine playing from an assorted cast of characters that befit a release from a true Canadian wonder.

Ken Whitely take a bow.

Whitely plays guitar, National Steel, mandolin, organ, piano, accordion and triangle and sings. Virtuoso George Koller joins him on acoustic and electric bass. Brother Chris plays trumpet and harmonica. And other varied guests join in on Celtic harp, fiddle, and steel guitar on this collection of mainly original songs that sound old and familiar in the styles we have come to love from Ken Whitely.

It's a vocal romp, too, with terrific four-part capella harmonies. From his days in the Original Sloth Band, Whitely has maintained a long career of delivering his versions of the old classic styles. And again he has succeeded. It's a very pleasant listen.

— By Les Siemieniuk

Michael McGoldrick

Fused

Vertical Records
7 4298 2

You might have heard Michael McGoldrick's brilliant flute playing with Capercaillie or on the two Lúnasa CDs. Now this young Mancunian, born of Irish parents

and raised in the Irish tradition, has put out a warm, breezy solo album that enlarges his reputation as one of today's finest flute players.

Not that it's totally traditional, even the title hints at the dreaded "F" word ... Fusion. Not to worry. Although keyboards and bass underpin the swaying rhythms that pervade the pieces, they're kept in place. His rich toned flute predominates, along with some fine fiddle, guitar, accordion and bodhran.

McGoldrick revels in a joyous, undulating, optimistic style, blending some of the old tunes with original compositions. Among the highlights are *Waterman's*, an engaging flight of fancy that kicks the set off; *Fisher Street*, a great dance piece with some smoldering trumpet; another take on *Terry Teahans*, looser and breathier than the version with Lúnasa, and partnered with an inspired piece from Junior Crehan; *Windbroke*, two inventive melodies from McGoldrick; *Buain A Chioirce*, featuring the captivating voice of Karen Matheson; *Ridde*, with the elegant fingers of Dezi Donnelly caressing the fiddle on the opening bit; *Reid's Reels*, another chance to jump about; and a gorgeous song from Karan Casey over the subtlest of backgrounds. *Fused* points the way forward for a music that grows by incorporating disparate influences, an approach that will surely be emulated, and widely accepted as valid and stimulating.

— By David Ingram

Robin Laing Imaginary Lines

Greentrax
CDtrax185

Imaginary Lines drifts along, ethereally floating whether the song is happy, sad, or lamenting the state of the world or man's inhumanity to man. It clearly lacks passion. Robin Laing is a decent enough writer, a competent interpreter, and would have been a hit in the early sixties. But this disc needs more emotion and innovation to be truly moving

— By Les Siemieniuk

Traveler: A Six Degrees Collection

Various Artists
Six Degrees Records
657036 1046-2

Nice is as good a word as any to describe this disc of somewhat infectious global grooves. The jazzy riffs with Asian and/or Latin beats are pleasant, and I don't necessarily mean that in a bad way. But you won't hear this sampler in a dance club, more likely in a restaurant aimed at a more "discerning palette" or snooty fern bar. At best it's good background music with Zihan & Kamien's *Homebase* and Bob Holroyd's *Drumming Up*

A Storm being particular standouts. The strongest track, though, is the State of Bengal's *Rama Communication*. Possibly best known for their contribution to the Star Rise recording of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan remixes compiled by Michael Brook, *Rama Communication* is an excellent example of traditional world music brought up to date with modern dance technology. It'll urge you to track down your old Fela Kuti LPs, invoke memories of a particular favourite Laurie Anderson concert, or prompt thoughts of the fun that Japan's Pizzacato 5 seen to have with their music.

— By Dave McQueen

Dave McCann & The Ten Toed Frogs Woodland Tea

Independent
MCC23667

Not too much about Dave McCann and his amphibious friends with funny feet I can tell you I'm afraid. Other than the fact that he recorded his compelling *Surrounding Green* on Lawrence Christmas's wonderful compilation of contemporary Canadian mining songs, *Coaldust Grins*. That said, McCann, it appears, records in Calgary and has recruited a substantial team of local talent to make this quite remarkable recording.

While clearly kindred spirits of Fred Eaglesmith, Uncle Tupelo, Gillian Welch and suchlike, McCann's confident, fascinating, weather-beaten vocal delivery adds an irresistible potency to his enthralling combination of old-time mountain music and roots country. While largely acoustic with fiddle, accordion, mandolin, banjo and guitar doing the majority of the donkey work, there's the occasional tasteful trace of Sandy Switzer's pedal steel highlighting the likes of the beautiful *Grain Car* and equally gorgeous *Farm Dog Free*.

Surrounding Green makes another appearance, minus Jane Hawley's harmonies, but loses nothing in the transition. And while Bruce Cockburn would be proud of the commanding presence of *Circle Stones*, the undeniable highlight of this record is the glorious

wasteland of *Gasoline & Sunshine* with its grungey guitar complementing the menace of urban decay encroaching on rural pastures. Fred Eaglesmith eat your heart out. Quite a potent brew, then, this *Woodland Tea*. Cheers.

[Available from Dave McCann, 311 22nd Ave., S.W. Calgary, Alberta, T2S 0H3]

— By Roddy Campbell

Battlefield Band Happy Daze Temple Records COMD2085

With a tragic twist of irony, this album arrived in the mail the same day the sad news came from Scotland that Davy Steele had passed away. A wonderful traditional singer and songwriter, Steele's addition to the Battlefield Band provided much needed impetus after the crippling departure of Brian McNeill.

Thus, *Leaving Friday Harbor* was their strongest release in possibly a decade. While Alan Reid remains the only original member, the Battlefield Band have survived nearly a quarter of a century with a largely mercurial lineup. And so macAlias's Karine Polwart — the first female in the band since Jenny Clark in 1979 — replaces Steele.

Like her predecessor, Polwart's impact is both refreshing and immediate. She's a dramatic and sensitive singer. And despite the silly *Whaur Will We Gang?*, it's the songs — her remarkable take on the traditional *Bank of Red Roses*, her own impressive *Shepherd Lad* and *Start It All Over Again*, and Reid's superb, *The Riccarton Tollman's Daughter* — that make by far the largest impact. While the sharp, crisp, clean-cut instrumentals harken back to the innocent days of *At The Front* or *Battlefield Band* (but with bagpipes), it's equally satisfying to find Reid's keyboards far less obtrusive now than in latter-day outings.

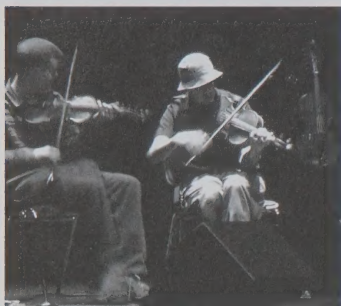
Of course, much emotional baggage comes with *Happy Daze*. "This album is for Davy," the sleeve notes say. It's ultimately a fitting tribute to a lost colleague.

— By Roddy Campbell



Battlefield Band

Live



Harv

Ranarim, Harv and Groupa

WISE Hall
Vancouver, B.C.

Opening act Ranarim – an acoustic quartet, composed of vocalists Sofia Sanden and Ulrika Boden and instrumentalists Niklas Roswall (nyckelharpa) and Jens Engelbrecht (mandola, guitar) – achieved the musical equivalent of a finely embroidered tapestry; something at once ancient but beautiful. Whether clipping along through a rollicking medieval dance tune, cradling in a tender love song, or storytelling via a narrative ballad, they captivated ears and hearts entirely. Despite translation setbacks, their music grew luminous like the sun itself, thawing my winter blues.

Harv, amused me. This spirited trio, considered “the bright young stars of the Nordic roots revival,” came bouncing on stage with beers in hand and attitude to spare. Equipment failures notwithstanding, they soldiered into their inspired set, fiddles smoking, bows blazing. What impressed me most was not so much their technical chops, but their beaming smiles and the obvious pure joy they found in simply playing.

The electro-acoustic quintet Groupa ended the evening with such a dynamic, layered sound that it is difficult to put a handle on them. Sometimes evoking ancient oak groves, at other times laser-arc-welding, industrial jazz improv with a jungle rock groove. Groupa might well be called pathfinders – explorers in the sonic landscape. Their fearlessness acted like a contagion, infecting my senses. And in a moment of detached lucidity, everything – the whole damned universe, the big old goofy world included, suddenly, momentarily – made sense.

— By Joe MacEachern.

Vancouver Celtic Festival

Seven bands played Vancouver’s 7th annual Celtic Festival, presenting four aspects of the tradition.

Victoria’s Carolyn Mark showed how much the old reels and jigs have been transformed here in the western hemisphere with the inclusion of some rocking country songs.

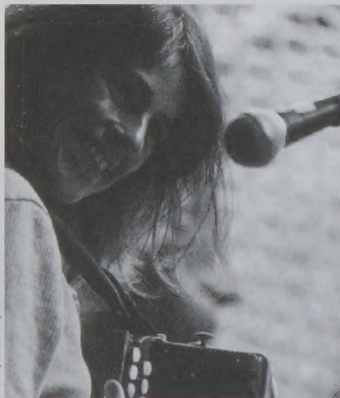
Vancouver’s Linda Macrae sang rootsy songs with lovely leads from her pedal steel player. Tom Landa and the Paperboys successfully mixed original songs and Latin rhythms with hot playing from fiddler Shannon Saunders and flautist Geoff Kelly.

Cape Breton’s Slàinte Mhath were the first to get people up dancing, and their new piper can take some credit for that. He has added more spark to the group’s already fiery sound, and gels excellently with the talents of Lisa Gallant and the MacNeil brothers, Boyd and Brian.

Old Blind Dogs have been around for more than a decade, and are among the very best of Scottish outfits. The revamped lineup has just finished a second CD, and revved up the audience with many of the new songs and tunes, as well as numbers from their impressive back catalogue.

Lastly, a fabulous Irish set from Sharon Shannon. The button accordion master’s band includes her multi-instrumentalist sister Mary, the rhythm section from Coolfin, a superb guitarist, and the sizzling Kane sisters on fiddles, and together they were superb. An added treat was Dessie O’Halloran singing three songs and playing some mighty fiddle too. The joy and skill of their music was memorable, and a top notch finale to a great little festival.

— By David Ingram



Sharon Shannon

Maria Muldaur

Sweetwater
Mill Valley
California

“You might remember that song Midnight at the something or other,” Maria Muldaur said in jest to a packed house at the Sweetwater, in her Northern California home town of Mill Valley.

Of course, she was referring to her chestnut from the 1970s — *Midnight At The Oasis* — and one of her main claims to fame.

Kicking off a North American tour to promote her latest release, *Richland Woman Blues*, her band featured guitar, keyboards, and on bass, tuba and ukelele, Freebo, who played with Muldaur in the 1970s. Local favourite Bonnie Raitt also helped out.

Raitt’s appearance on stage in the second half of the show drew yelps from the audience of, “We love you Bonnie.” In return, she proclaimed that Maria’s songs were so great, “I’m going to nominate them for a Grammy.” The audience howled in agreement while Muldaur, 57, stood with hands clasped in prayer.

“I feel like I’ve just begun to hit my stride, musically and creatively,” she said in an interview.

It shows in her richly textured singing. “When I sing these songs now,” says Muldaur, “I’m finally able to feel that I have the right instrument, the depth of experience and the artistic chops to properly celebrate these great pioneering artists and their music.”

Though Muldaur alternated between early blues and high, clear ballads, it is in the witty, sexual, mince-no-words style of numbers such as Blue Lu Barker’s *Don’t You Feel My Leg*, Leiber and Stoller’s *I’m A Woman* and Wesley “Sox” Wilson’s *Do Your Duty* that she shines.

With a wink and a nudge, Muldaur delivered songs in a siren style reminiscent of the ’70s, flirting with the audience and demanding that her man live up to her (usually sexual) standards.

— By Wendy DeMos

Reviewers wanted

Penguin Eggs welcomes contributions for both our Live and Recordings sections. While no previous writing experience is necessary, we do have a helpful set of guidelines for you to follow. Please do not submit articles on performers with whom you have a professional attachment. For further information please contact editor Roddy Campbell at: penguineggs@hotmail.com

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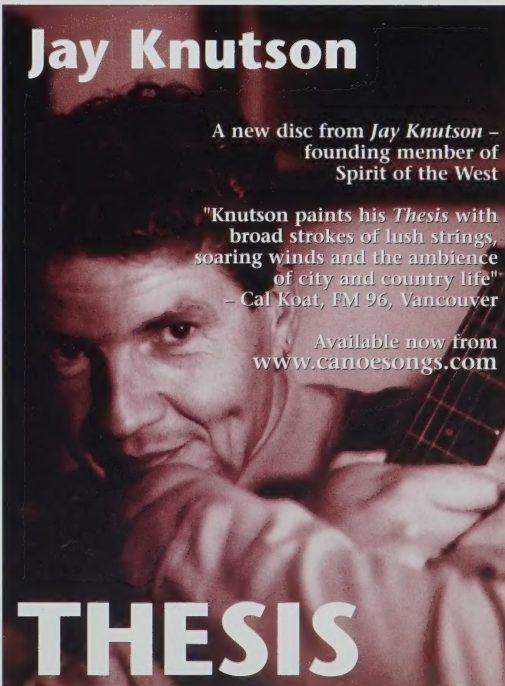
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